NATION

SC asks 'Jana Nayagan' producer to move Madras High Court

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Oil prices fall 4% as Trump softens stance on Iran

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Vijay Hazare: Vidarbha's Mokhade makes history

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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Indelible ink used in BMC polls easy to wipe off: Oppn

This comes after SCE uses marker pen instead of usual ink

Several videos on social media show voters wiping off the 'indelible' ink with acetone or nail polish remover. The mark is supposed to stay on the finger for several days and should not come off easily **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

MUMBAI, 15 JAN

Long-delayed elections to Mumbai's civic body began on Thursday but were soon engulfed in controversy after claims surfaced that the ink applied to voters' fingers could be removed using acetone, raising concerns over possible bogus voting.

As polling for the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and 28 other municipal corporations got underway, several videos circulated on social media showing voters wiping off the 'indelible' ink with acetone or nail polish remover.

Indelible ink is applied to a voter's finger after voting. Its only purpose is to ensure that no one votes more than once. The mark is supposed to stay on the finger for several days and should not come off easily.

The BMC dismissed the allegations, stating that reports of ink being wiped off were incorrect. However, amid mounting criticism, the State Election Commission (SEC) ordered a probe into the viral videos. This comes after SEC started using marker pens instead of the indelible ink. State Election Commissioner Dinesh Waghmare said the marker ink takes time to dry and should not be wiped immediately. He added that the Kores marker ink has been in use since 2011 and its chemical composition was correct. Cases would be filed against those spreading a "fake narrative", he said.

Opposition leaders, including Congress MP Varsha Gaikwad, shared videos demonstrating the ink being removed. A television journalist also posted a similar video after voting in Panvel. Even NDA minister Sanjay Shirsat admitted the ink could be removed easily, warning of possible bogus voting. BJP minister Ashish Shelar demanded criminal action against those attempting to wipe off ink

The issue comes amid opposition allegations of voter list manipulation. The BMC elections, held after a nine-year gap, saw 1,700 candidates contesting 227 seats. The counting is scheduled for Friday. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

- The BMC dismissed the allegations, stating that reports of ink being wiped off were incorrect.

Overall turnout

50%

BJP minister's name goes missing from voter list

MUMBAI, 15 JAN

Maharashtra minister and BJP leader Ganesh Naik on Thursday claimed his name was missing from the Navi Mumbai civic voters' list, forcing him to run between polling centres for hours before casting his vote.

Naik said he had voted for years at Navi Mumbai School No. 94 but was told this time to go to St Mary High School. "When I went there, there was no room number 9 and my name was not in the voters' list," he told reporters.

He said his family members, living in the same building, were split across three polling centres. Naik later found his name at St Mary School and voted, but criticised officials, saying they "were not working up to the mark" and should have been more careful. He blamed the State Election Commission for the lapse.

LATE EX-MP LISTED AS VOTER IN SAMBHAJINGAR

Meanwhile, officials in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar confirmed that the name of former Shiv Sena MP Moreshwar Save, who died on 16 July, 2015, appeared in the voters' list at the Khadkeshwar voting centre. Save was the father of Maharashtra OBC Welfare Minister Atul Save. *—PTI*

The probe agency has claimed that Mamata Banerjee entered the premises and took away 'key' evidence related to the probe **PHOTO: PTI**

SC issues notice to Didi, quashes FIR against ED over IPAC

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

> **This is a case where mobocracy replaces democracy. The TMC legal wing circulated WhatsApp messages asking people to gather in HC due to which the court had to force adjournment**
>
> -ED tells SC. It claims that Cal HC adjourned on 9 Jan because of TMC mob

The Supreme Court on Thursday described the Enforcement Directorate's allegation that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee obstructed its probe as "very serious".

The apex court further agreed to examine whether State law-enforcement agencies can interfere with Central investigations into serious offences.

A bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Vipul Pancholi stayed the FIR registered by West Bengal police against ED officials following 8 January raids at the office of political consultancy firm I-PAC and the residence of its director, Pratik Jain.

It further directed the State police to preserve CCTV footage of the searches. Notices were issued to Banerjee, the State government, DGP Rajeev Kumar and senior officers on the ED's plea seeking a CBI probe into the alleged obstruction.

The bench said adherence to the rule of law required examining whether offenders were being shielded by State agencies, warning that unresolved issues could lead to lawlessness. It observed that while Central agencies cannot interfere with election work, they cannot be prevented from conducting bona fide investigations into serious crimes. The matter will be heard on 3 February.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the ED, alleged a "shocking pattern" of interference, claiming Banerjee entered the I-PAC premises and removed key evidence. He urged action against officers present during the incident.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Banerjee, said she went to the I-PAC office as Trinamool Congress chairperson after information about unauthorised entry, noting the firm handles the party's election data. He denied allegations of device seizure, citing the ED's panchnama. *—PTI*

India to host EU leaders for R-Day amid FTA talks

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Invited by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, top European Union (EU) officials, António Costa and Ursula von der Leyen, will arrive in India from 25 to 27 January to attend the 77th Republic Day celebrations as chief guests. Every year, India invites world leaders to attend its Republic Day celebrations. During their visit, the leaders will also co-chair the India-EU Summit on 27 January. During the summit, they are expected to finalise a key free trade deal, addressing Washington's new trade and tariff policies. Additionally, a defence framework pact and a strategic agenda will be unveiled at the summit. The trade agreement is expected to deepen bilateral ties between India and the EU. *—PTI*

Pak boat with 9 siezed off Gujarat coast

AHMEDABAD, 15 JAN

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) on Thursday seized a Pakistani fishing boat, Al-Madina, with nine crew members inside Indian waters near the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). The boat attempted to flee towards Pakistan but was intercepted and boarded by the ICG. It is being towed to Porbandar for inspection and joint interrogation of the crew. The operation underscores the ICG's commitment to securing India's maritime frontiers through vigilant patrolling and law enforcement. *—PTI*

Noida residents fall ill due to water contamination

NOIDA, 15 JAN

Many residents of Alpha 2 sector in Greater Noida reported vomiting, stomach pain and other ailments, alleging supply of contaminated, foul-smelling water for the past week. The complaints follow similar illnesses reported earlier in nearby Delta 1. Alpha 2 Residents' Welfare Association (RWA) President Subhash Bhati said a medical team inspected several houses and found multiple residents unwell. He claimed around 70 people were earlier diagnosed with water-linked illnesses and alleged ageing pipelines were allowing sewage to mix with drinking water. Students and families said black, dirty water flowed from taps, forcing them to rely on RO water even for bathing. *—PTI*

EC bins proposal to accept class 10 docs for WB SIR

KOLKATA, 15 JAN

The EC has rejected a proposal by the West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer to accept Class 10 (Madhyamik) admit cards for verification during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, saying the document is not among those permitted under its 27 October, 2025 guidelines. Informing the Supreme Court, the EC said its authority on citizenship is limited to voter registration and does not extend to deportation or visa decisions. Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi cited Article 326 to justify the SIR. The TMC alleged political vendetta after a SIR notice was issued to MP Samirul Islam over discrepancies in records. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

LEAP OF FAITH

Cows leap over fire as part of Makar Sankranti celebrations at Kanakanapalya, Jayanagar, Bengaluru, on Thursday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Iran shuts airspace for 4 hrs amid US strikes fears

DUBAI/NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Iran closed its airspace to commercial flights for over four hours on Thursday, disrupting global aviation as tensions remain high with the US following Tehran's crackdown on nationwide protests. The closure affected a key East–West flight corridor, forcing international carriers to divert routes.

Indian airlines Air India and IndiGo cancelled and delayed several overseas services, while SpiceJet issued advisories warning of disruptions. Air India cancelled at least three US-bound flights — two from Delhi to New York and Newark, and one from Mumbai to New York.

Air India uses Iranian airspace for US and Europe services, with Iraqi airspace as the alternative. However, longer routes via Iraq mean insufficient fuel range for certain US flights, officials said. Air India said alternative routings could cause delays. Air India fears more loses as Pakistan's airspace closure continues to raise cost it Rs 4,000 crore. *—PTI*

>>More on Pages 4& 6

SC reserves order on Delhi man's euthanasia plea

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

The Supreme Court on Thursday reserved its judgment on a plea filed by the father of a 31-year-old man, seeking passive euthanasia for his son who has been on life support for 12 years.

The man, Harish Rana, suffered head injuries after falling from the fourth floor of a building in 2013.

Passive euthanasia is the intentional act of letting a patient die by withdrawing life support to keep him alive.

The court highlighted the importance of the family taking a "consistent and well-considered" decision.

The father, Ashok Rana's counsel submitted that hospitals should nominate doctors who would be part of medical boards assigned to undertake the medical examinations in cases where family members have come forward with such a wish. The top court also termed an AIIMS Delhi report containing Rana's medical history "sad." AIIMS' medical board had stressed the negligible chance of his recovery. The apex court sought the Centre's response in 2025 on the plea of the parents. It had agreed with the Delhi High Court, which had refused to constitute a medical board to consider the plea. *—PTI*

AI crash: Pilot's nephew summoned for probe

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Deceased Captain Sumeet Sabharwal **PHOTO: PTI**

The Federation of Indian Pilots (FIP) has issued a legal notice to the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) over the summoning of Captain Varun Anand, nephew of Air India 171 pilot Captain Sumeet Sabharwal, for questioning, sources said.

Anand was informed of the summons by Air India.

Air India flight 171 from Ahmedabad to London crashed after take-off on 12 June, killing 260 people, including 19 on the ground.

Some reports blamed pilot error, citing an alleged cockpit exchange between Captain Sabharwal and First Officer Clive Kundar.

Rejecting the claims, the pilots' body said the crash was due to a technical glitch and that there was no evidence of pilot fault.

"Summoning Capt. Varun Anand, who has no association with the incident, is unwarranted and amounts to harassment," the FIP said.

The federation cited Civil Aviation Organisation rules barring summons. Sources said Anand is willing to assist into the matter. *—Agencies*

PROTECTING ECOLOGY

Trekking banned in Kudremukh division to prevent forest fires

MANGALURU, 15 JAN

As a precautionary measure to prevent forest fires and ensure the safety of the public, tourists and trekkers, authorities have temporarily banned trekking activities in several forest and wildlife areas under the Kudremukh Wildlife Division.

The ban applies to trekking routes located within the Kudremukh National Park, Someshwara Wildlife Sanctuary and Mookambika Wildlife Sanctuary. An official order has been issued by the assistant conservator of forests of the Kudremukh Wildlife Division, Karkala.

Trekking activities, if not regulated, could pose a serious threat to forest ecology and wildlife, besides endangering human lives.

The order states that entry to all designated trekking trails in the above protected areas will remain prohibited from 14 January until further notice.

Authorities have urged the public and adventure enthusiasts to cooperate with the forest department and strictly adhere to the restrictions.

Officials said the move is part of a have also been intensified in vulnerable areas. broader strategy to strengthen fire prevention measures and to protect sensitive forest zones from accidental or man-made fires. Increased surveillance and patrolling

Violations of the ban will attract legal action under the relevant provisions of forest and wildlife protection laws, officials warned. *—PTI*

Woman stabbed to death while waiting for cab

KOLAR, 15 JAN

Sujatha, 28 of Dasarahosahalli village in Bangarpet taluk was fatally stabbed by Chiranjeevi, 27, near the National Highway zig-zag on Thursday morning. The incident occurred around 8.00am while Sujatha waited for a cab to her workplace in the Narasapura industrial area. Chiranjeevi, a private bank employee, reportedly tried to persuade her to accompany him. When she refused, he stabbed her, killing her instantly. Onlookers caught and beat him before handing him to police. The two had been friends for months. Sujatha, married with one child, and Chiranjeevi, married with two children, had disputes over money he had lent her family. Sujatha had recently completed a nursing course and joined a company. Police said Chiranjeevi had earlier attempted to harass her at home. *—Salar News*

Elephant strays into Gundlupet, wrecks vehicles

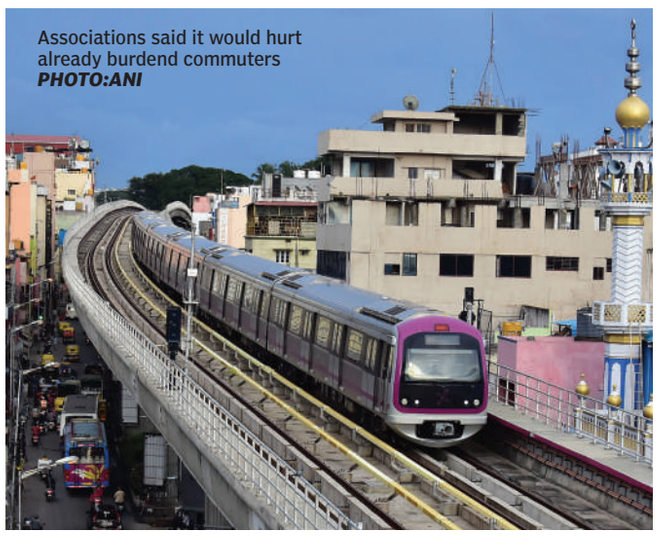
MYSURU, 15 JAN

A male elephant that strayed from the forest caused chaos in Marigudi Street, Gundlupet town, Chamarajanagar district, in the early hours of Thursday. CCTV footage from outside the home of former Municipal Council president Kiran captured the elephant damaging parked bikes and scooters, reportedly provoked by street dogs. Fortunately, no one was injured as the town was largely deserted. Gundlupet Town Range Forest Officer Shivakumar said the department recovered the footage and launched an operation to guide the elephant back into the forest. The animal is currently at Heggavadi Gudda in the Kundukure range of Bandipur Tiger Reserve, having moved from the town through Daribegur and Yeriyur. Efforts will continue on Friday to return it to deeper jungle areas. *—Salar news*

Citizens slam proposed 5% Metro fare hike

Double-whammy for commuters after last year's 70% hike

BENGALURU, 15 JAN



Associations said it would hurt already burdend commuters *PHOTO:ANI*

Citizens said that any fare hike to Bengaluru's Namma Metro would penalise already burdened daily commuters. The Fare Fixation Committee (FCC) had earlier proposed that the Metro fares can be hiked annually by up to 5 per cent.

However, the Save Bangalore Committee (SBC) and the Bengaluru Metro Commuters' Association (BMCA) opposed the announcement, and noted in a joint statement on Thursday that this comes barely a year after the massive 71 per cent fare hike. Notably, the City's Metro is one of the most expensive in the country.

The Metro administration justified the proposed hike by saying that it was bound by the FFC recommendation and Section 33 of the Metro Rail Act, 2002. However, the SBC and the BMCA said that the recommendation is not a mandatory hike but an advisory.

"The Metro administration's defence… is a legally convenient but morally bankrupt excuse," they stated.

"This (proposed) hike represents a failure of governance and imagination," they added. "Instead of seeking innovative, non-burdening revenue models such as enhanced commercial exploitation of metro property or operational efficiencies the administration chooses the easiest path: digging deeper into the pockets of its riders."

Claiming that the hike would betray public trust, the statement said it would come at a time "when citizens are grappling with persistent inflation and economic strain".

The SBC and BMCA demanded that the Metro fares were not hiked and vowed to fight it legally and mobilise public opinion.

"The Metro must remain an affordable lifeline," they wrote. *—Salar News*

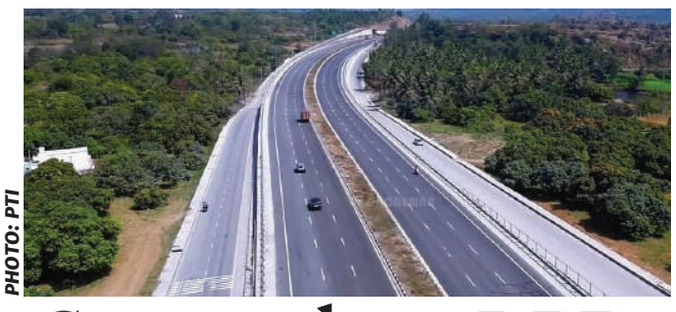


PHOTO: PTI

Centre okays DPRs for DK highways

MANGALURU , 15 JAN

The Centre has approved the preparation of detailed project reports (DPR) for several key highway projects in the Dakshina Kannada district. Consultants have been formally instructed to begin work.

BJP MP Captain Brijesh Chowta announced the approval on Thursday, which includes the widening of the Surathkal–BC Road stretch via the Mangaluru Bypass and the construction of service roads along NH-66 from Talapady to Kundapur.

The highways serve as major entry corridors to Mangaluru city and are vital for daily passenger movement as well as the transport of goods to and from the New Mangalore Port. However, the lack of service roads and capacity constraints has resulted in severe congestion and safety concerns, Chowta said.

Following continuous representations, Chowta pursued the matter with the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI). During the 2024 Monsoon Session of Parliament, he met senior ministry officials to highlight the need for service roads on NH-66. The issue was also raised at the DISHA committee meeting held in Mangaluru in September 2024. *—PTI*

CHAMARAJA BECOMES JUNCTURE FOR BJP AFTER SIMHA'S POLL BID

MYSURU, 15 JAN

Former BJP member of parliament Pratap Simha said he will contest from the Chamaraja Assembly segment in Mysuru city in the next State Assembly polls.

The Chamaraja seat has emerged as a flashpoint within the BJP.

He said on Thursday that he chose Chamaraja as it is one of stronghold of BJP, with HS Shankaralinge Gowda being elected thrice from the constituency. He also said that it had a high number of educated voters in the Vokkaliga dominated constituency.

The constituency is currently held by Congress MLA Harish Gowda, who defeated BJP MLA L Nagendra in the 2023 Assembly polls.

Nagendra and neurologist Dr Shushrutha Gowda, who joined the BJP in 2024, have announced their intentions to contest from the seat.

Nagendra, who is also the BJP's Mysuru unit President, questioned Simha's absence from the BJP's campaign in the Chamaraja segment during the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. He urged Simha not to confuse voters with premature statements, and said the final decision rests with the High Command. *—Salar News*

Will be active in State politics if people want me, says HDK

BENGALURU, 15 JAN

Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel HD Kumaraswamy on Thursday said that he will continue to remain active in State politics, if the people want him.

The JD(S) second-in-command dismissed speculation about his role being limited to the Centre.

"I am in politics. It is the people of the State who will decide where I should be. Based on the wishes of the people, I will decide when to return to State politics," he said.

Referring to political alignments, Kumaraswamy said the JD(S) is a part of the NDA and it will not allow any confusion within the bloc. The objective was to ensure good governance in Karnataka.

He added that he was closely observing the functioning of the State administration.

JD(S) leader and Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy celebrates Makar Sankranti with differently-abled people at his farm house at Bidadi on Thursday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Referring to the Shidlaghatta incident where a Congress leader Rajeev Gowda abused the City Municipal Corporation Commissioner Amrutha Gowda for removing his banner, Kumaraswamy expressed concern over the growing pressure on officials.

He said strict action should be initiated against misbehaving political party workers and leaders. He alleged that pressure was being exerted on officials to carry out illegal activities. *—PTI*

Sidlaghatta row: Rajeev booked, gets Cong showcause

BENGALURU, 15 JAN

Congress leader Rajeev Gowda has been booked for threatening the Sidlaghatta Municipal Commissioner Amrutha Gowda over the removal of his banner from a busy junction in Chikkaballapura district.

The Sidlaghatta town police booked Rajeev based on a complaint lodged by Amrutha on Wednesday under various sections of the BNS. Amrutha alleged that he had threatened her, and said that he would beat her with a chappal .

The Congress State unit on Thursday also served a showcause notice to Rajeev. In the notice, GC Chandrashekhar, MP and Congress Working President (Administration), said Rajeev's conduct caused embarrassment to the party and amount to a violation of the party discipline. It directed him to submit a proper explanation within a week.

'SHOULD WE LEARN FROM BJP?'

IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge hit back at BJP criticism of the incident, asking if the Congress should learn from the BJP. Kharge claimed that the Leader of the Opposition in the Upper House had called him a dog in Chittapur recently.

"Should we learn culture from the BJP? Do you know what Muniratna and CT Ravi have said in the Council?" he asked, alleging that the BJP politicised religion, saying it did not have "even a paisa worth of culture". *—Agencies*

Headmistress held for jewellery theft in Belagavi

BELAGAVI, 15 JAN

A headmistress of a reputed English-medium school in Belagavi was arrested on Thursday for stealing gold jewellery and cash from a woman at the Central Bus Stand. Akshata Konnur, visiting from Hyderabad, had boarded a Belagavi–Beedi bus when her purse, containing a 30grm gold mangalsutra and Rs 5,000 in cash, was stolen. She reported the theft immediately, and police acted swiftly. The mangalsutra was found thrown out of the bus window. During passenger checks, the headmistress was identified as the culprit. Market Station Inspector JM Kalimirchi confirmed both the jewelery and cash were recovered and returned to Akshata. Akshata's husband works at the National Police Academy, Hyderabad. She had come home to celebrate the Sankranti festival. *—Salar News*

Tinthani Kanaka Guru Peetha head dies at 49

RAICHUR, 15 JAN

Siddharamananda Swami of the Tinthani Kanaka Guru Peetha, who headed the Kalaburagi Divisional Kanakaguru Peetha, died in the early hours of Thursday following a heart attack. He was 49-year-old.

According to sources close to his hermitage, Swami's blood pressure dropped late at night after he participated in bhajans. He was rushed to a private hospital in Lingsugur, where he suffered severe chest pain. He took his last breath at around 3.40am while undergoing treatment, sources said.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah condoled the demise, saying the passing of Paramapujya Sri Siddaramananda Mahaswamiji of the Sri Kaginele Mahasamsthana Kanakaguru Peetha branch at Tinthani Bridge was deeply painful.

In a post on X, the Chief Minister said Siddharamananda Swami's commitment to social upliftment alongside religious activities made his loss irreparable for the state. "I pray that his divine soul attains eternal peace and that his devotees and followers are granted strength to bear this grief," Siddaramaiah said.

Siddharamananda Swami, born Mohan Pradhan, hailed from Chitradurga district, located along the Vedavati river valley in central Karnataka. *—PTI*

Two arrested over communal WhatsApp post in Mangaluru

MANGALURU, 15 JAN

City police in Mangaluru have registered an FIR against two individuals for allegedly circulating a provocative WhatsApp message that warned Hindus to "wake up before Mangaluru turns into Mini Bangladesh."

The post, which went viral on social media platforms, has raised concerns over its potential to incite communal tension and violence.

Mangaluru City Police Commissioner Sudhir Kumar Reddy on Thursday said the message was shared by a person identified as Ravindra and referred to a cluster of shops operating behind the Rao and Rao Circle autorickshaw stand, where a signboard reading 'Bengali Canteen' has been displayed.

Addressing the media, the Police Commissioner said the circulation of such messages could trigger attacks on innocent people.

PHOTO: AI

He referred to a recent incident in which an Indian migrant worker was assaulted in the city following similar rumours, for which police had taken swift action.

The Commissioner clarified that police had verified the background of the family mentioned in the message and found that property had been legally purchased in their name in 2014.

- The post warned Hindus to pay attention before Mangaluru turned into a mini Bangladesh. The post containted a picture with a signboard to a shop called 'Bengali Canteen'

He urged citizens not to jump to conclusions based on names, language, or appearance.

He further stated that if anyone has credible information about illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, they should report it to the police stations, Assistant Commissioners of Police, or the Commissioner's office. Police warned that sharing messages branding Indian citizens as Bangladeshis would invite strict legal action. *—PTI*

'IS SHAH EATING PEANUTS'

On allegation about an influx of Bangleshi immigrants, Kharge said: "How they are entering the country? Is guarding the border G Parameshwara's job? Is Amit Shah eating peanuts? How are they crossing BJP-ruled states and reaching Karnataka?"

DyCM DK Shivakumar seeks the blessing of a bull near his Sadashivanagar residence in the City, on Thursday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

MY EFFORTS FAIL POST WAS ABOUT CAUVERY, NOT CM CHANGE: DKS

BENGALURU, 15 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said on Thursday that his social media post "effort may fail but prayers won't," was related to the Cauvery water dispute and not his meeting with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi amid the alleged power tussle for the Chief Minister's post.

"Due to my prayers, the Cauvery issue has taken a new shape in the court. The court has told the Centre that it has to take a decision on the Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir issue. Hence, I tweeted it," Shivakumar said.

Shivakumar had met Gandhi in Mysuru on Tuesday during the latter's transit to Tamil Nadu. Gandhi met Chief Minister Siddaramaiah separately.

On his meeting on Wednesday with Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, Shivakumar said it was part of party protocol.

Shivakumar said he would visit New Delhi tomorrow as he had a meeting on the Assam Assembly polls. *—PTI*

A DAY OF JOY

Sankranti celebrated across State with fervour

BENGALURU, 15 JAN

Makar Sankranti was celebrated with deep religious fervour across the State on Thursday, with temples drawing heavy crowds.

The households followed age-old rituals marking the Sun's transition into Makara Rashi. In City, thousands of devotees thronged the historic Gavi Gangadhareshwara Temple in Basavanagudi from early morning hours.

The cave temple holds special significance on Makar Sankranti as the setting Sun's rays pass through the horns of the stone Nandi and illuminate the Shiva Linga inside the shrine. Temple authorities said the rare phenomenon, witnessed in the afternoon, symbolises cosmic alignment and Lord Shiva's blessings.

Police and temple officials made elaborate arrangements to regulate crowds as devotees queued patiently for darshan of the presiding deity. Similar scenes were reported across the State, with worshippers offering prayers at temples and observing traditional customs at home.

People prepare Pongal, Thursday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

The festival, known locally as Suggi, marks the harvest season in the State. Families prepared festive dishes and exchanged 'Ellu-Bella', a mixture of sesame seeds, jaggery, groundnuts and coconut, wishing safety and prosperity. In rural regions, farmers celebrated with special pujas, cattle worship and community gatherings, expressing gratitude for a good crop. Cultural programmes and traditional games added colour to celebrations in several districts.

Markets across the State reported brisk sales of flowers, jujube fruits and sugarcane, essential for Sankranti rituals, reflecting the festive spirit and widespread participation in the celebrations. Devotees described the festival as a time of renewal, harmony, seasonal abundance, spiritual reflection. *—PTI*

2 women sing 'Gubbiyalo' to mark Sankranti

As Sankranti dawns in Kolar's Ramasandra village, two women in their mid-50s turn into storytellers. Munemma and Lakshmamma go from house to house singing the traditional 'Gubbiyalo' song. 'Gubbiyalo' is a folk song from Andhra Pradesh, typically sung by members of a particular community, to praise Lord Krishna. With every verse, the singing duo revive a fading folk practice. The women collect rice and jaggery from each house after completing the song, which they then use to make Pongal. They travel from village to village every few days.

BLO found dead, man dies amid 'SIR anxiety' in WB

KOLKATA, 15 JAN

A booth-level officer (BLO) in Kolkata and a senior citizen in Murshidabad died on Thursday, allegedly under pressure linked to the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, police said. The BLO, Ashok Das, an assistant teacher, was found hanging at his Mukundapur residence and was declared brought dead. His family alleged he was under tremendous pressure due to SIR duties. He was assigned as BLO for a booth in Purba Jadavpur. In Murshidabad's Samserganj, 60-year-old Putu Sheikh reportedly died of a heart attack, with his family blaming anxiety over SIR hearing notices. Police are probing both cases. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has earlier claimed 77 deaths linked to SIR-relate —*PTI*

TMC docu takes poll welfare pitch to big screen

KOLKATA, 15 JAN

Ahead of the West Bengal Assembly elections, due in 2026, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) has released a 55-minute documentary to highlight its welfare agenda and accuse the Centre of withholding funds meant for the state. Titled 'Lokkhi Elo Ghore', the film showcases flagship schemes of the Mamata Banerjee government, including Lakshmir Bhandar, Khadya Sathi, Krishak Bandhu, Swasthya Sathi, Kanyashree and Banglar Bari. Through a fictional rural widow's story, the documentary portrays these programmes as social equalisers that improve lives despite financial constraints. The TMC argues that the Centre has blocked legitimate dues, forcing Bengal to implement welfare schemes on its own, a narrative the party plans to foreground in the run-up to the polls. —*PTI*

Visa scam: Karti challenges charges in High Court

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Congress MP Karti Chidambaram on Thursday approached the Delhi High Court, challenging the framing of corruption and conspiracy charges against him in the alleged Chinese visa scam probed by the CBI. The petition, listed before Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma, will be heard on 19 January. The charges stem from a 2024 CBI chargesheet alleging bribery in facilitating Chinese visas for Talwandi Sabo Power Limited in 2011, when his father, P Chidambaram, was Union Home Minister. Karti argued the trial court ignored evidence, emphasising there was no bribe or conspiracy and visa "re-use" was routine. The CBI alleges he was approached via associate S Bhaskararaman, with bribes routed through TSPL and Bell Tools —*PTI*

'PM revamping Varanasi ghat for his nameplate'

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the redevelopment of Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi, alleging an attempt to erase historic heritage to "simply affix" his own nameplate. In a post on X, Kharge accused the Prime Minister of demolishing rare ancient heritage dating back to the Gupta period and later restored by Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar, under the guise of renovation. He claimed bulldozers were being used to destroy centuries-old religious, cultural and spiritual sites. Protests have erupted against the demolition. However, Varanasi District Magistrate Satyendra Kumar denied the allegations, stating that artefacts had been secured by the culture department and would be reinstalled in their original form after completion of the corridor project —*PTI*

Exit polls predict Mahayuti's victory in BMC

BJP-Sena may bag over 100 seats while UBT-MS is bound to get 58-68 seats

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and his family members after casting their votes at a polling station during the NMC elections, in Nagpur, Maharashtra, Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

MUMBAI, 15 JAN

All exit polls predicted a clear sweep for the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance in Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) polls, which took place on Thursday, and a defeat of the Shiv Sena (UBT)-Maharashtra Navnirman Sena.

According to My Axis India exit polls, the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance is poised to win 131-151 seats and garner 42 per cent of vote share in the country's commercial capital. The Shiv Sena (UBT)-MNS-NCP (SP) alliance of Uddhav Thackeray and Raj Thackeray is expected to win 58-68 seats and get a vote share of 32 per cent.

The Congress-Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi and Rashtriya Samaj Paksha alliance is expected to win 12-16 seats with a vote per cent of 13 per cent. Others, which comprise independents and small players like NCP, AIMIM, and the left parties, are likely to win 6-12 seats, it said.

There are 227 wards in Mumbai.

The Saam TV exit polls have predicted that the BJP is likely to win 84 seats, while its alliance partner Shiv Sena could bag 35 seats in Mumbai. Shiv Sena (UBT) and the MNS will get 65 and 10 seats, respectively. NCP (SP), which is part of the Sena (UBT)-MNS alliance, is likely to get two seats.

In Pune, the BJP will be largest party and is expected to win 70 seats, while the NCP could get 55. The NCP (SP), which had tied up with the Ajit Pawar-led NCP, is poised to win 10 seats. The Shiv Sena, which contested the polls independently, could win 12 seats, according to the Saam TV exit polls.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) and the MNS, which contested polls independently, are expected to win five and two seats, respectively, in the state's second largest city, while the Congress could see victory in eight wards.

In neighbouring Thane, considered to be the stronghold of Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, where the Shiv Sena and BJP contested together, the former is expected to bag 72 seats and its alliance partner 26. The Sena (UBT) and MNS are likely to bag three and two seats respectively, the Saam TV exit polls said.

According to the Jubilant Data Studio exit polls, the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance is likely to win between 127-155 seats in Mumbai. The Shiv Sena (UBT)-MNS-NCP (SP) alliance could win seats in the range of 44-64. The Congress-led alliance could win 16-25 seats.

In Pune, it said the BJP could win 79-92 seats, followed by NCP (48-61). The Shiv Sena could win eight-eleven seats, NCP (SP) (four-six), Shiv Sena (UBT) (four to five) MNS (zero-two), Congress (11-14).

In Thane, the Shiv Sena is expected to win seats in the range of 69-76, the BJP could bag 26-30 seats, Sena UBT (zero-two), MNS (zero to one), NCP (SP) (12-16) and NCP (six-eight) and Congress (one-two), according to the Jubilant Data Studio exit polls. —*PTI*

Gulzar; Aamir Khan; Nitin Gadkari; Piyush Goyal and Hema Malini, after casting their votes for Mumbai polls **PHOTO: PTI**

VOTERS COMPLAIN OF BOOTH CHANGES AND DIFFICULTY IN FINDING NAMES IN ELECTION ROLLS

Shiv Sena (UBT) Chief Uddhav Thackeray with wife Rashmi Thackeray and sons Aaditya Thackeray and Tejas Thackeray after casting their vote at a polling station during the BMC elections, in Mumbai **PHOTO: PTI**

MUMBAI, 15 JAN

Several Mumbaikars on Thursday reported difficulties in exercising their franchise during the ongoing civic polls, citing sudden changes in polling booths, confusion over electoral rolls and poorly printed voter lists.

Many voters said their long-standing polling stations had been shifted or merged without adequate prior information, forcing them to run between helpdesks to locate their names. The confusion was most visible during the morning hours across several parts of the city. Even polling staff and party workers complained that unclear photographs on electoral rolls made voter verification cumbersome.

Kalachowki resident Sanjay Shinde said his polling booth, located near the local police station for the past two elections, had been shifted to a distant BMC parking facility. "I also struggled to find my name in the supplementary list," he said. A Shiv Sena functionary from Parel claimed several voters left for work without voting after discovering their booths had been changed.

In some cases, residents from the same building were assigned polling stations far apart. Polling staff were seen assisting voters in tracing their assigned booths. A Vile Parle voter said his name continued to appear on rolls at his former Dindoshi address despite submitting a declaration about his shift, forcing him to fill another form before being allowed to vote.

Meanwhile, sporadic EVM glitches were reported in Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad, with 15–20 machines replaced promptly, officials said. NCP (SP) leader Rohit Pawar alleged time lags and malfunctioning indicators, calling for clarity from the State Election Commission.

Shiv Sena (UBT) Chief Uddhav Thackeray alleged widespread irregularities, accused the SEC of collusion with the BJP-led government, and demanded the suspension of the state election commissioner. Polling is underway in 29 municipal corporations across Maharashtra, including Parbhani, where a ballot unit was briefly replaced due to a link error. —*PTI*

BJP CANDIDATE IN NAGPUR SERIOUSLY INJURED IN ATTACK

Former BJP corporator and Nagpur civic candidate Bhushan Shingne was seriously injured after being attacked by a group in Gorewada on the election-eve, police said on Thursday. He suffered fractures and was hospitalised. An FIR names a local resident and others; police

booked attempt to murder and are investigating the case. —*PTI*

EVMS DAMAGED IN DHULE, LEADER'S HOME VANDALISED

Dhule in Maharashtra witnessed civic poll violence over the past 48 hours, including two groups scuffling and damaging an EVM and a mob vandalising Shiv Sena leader Manoj More's residence, police said. Police said cases were registered against

supporters of More and BJP's Vilas Shinde. —*PTI*

NEARLY 24 LAKH NAMES

SC asks EC to publish Kerala's deleted voters list

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Election Commission to make public the names of people excluded from the draft electoral rolls published in Kerala.

The apex court asked the poll panel to consider extending the deadline by two weeks, for filing objections against the deletion of names.

The bench was hearing a batch of petitions challenging the special intensive revision (SIR) process undertaken in Kerala.

The petitioners include Kerala, politicians like IUML's PK Kunhalikutty of IUML, CPI-M's MV Govindan Masterand Sunny Joseph, alongside the CPI State Council.

The pleas said that the SIR process risks disenfranchising a massive segment of the population.

The counsel for the petitioners submitted that nearly 24 lakh names had been deleted from the draft electoral rolls. While voters are required to file objections against deletion, the list of excluded persons has not been made accessible.

During the previous hearing, the poll panel had extended the original deadline for submission of enumeration forms from 4 December to 11 December.

Subsequently, pursuant to the court's observations, the deadline was further extended to 18 December. —*PTI*

'DIVERT, ACCESS OR DISRUPT'

TMC, BJP exchange war of words over I-PAC

KOLKATA, 15 JAN

TMC on Thursday called ED's raids at I-PAC premises as "political search" ahead of elections, while BJP accused Chief Minister **Mamata Banerjee** of obstructing central agencies.

TMC Spokesperson Kunal Ghosh questioned the raid on I-PAC director Pratik Jain's residence and asked why no such action was taken earlier if the case was so serious. When the case was registered, election strategist Prashant Kishor was associated with the party, but his premises were never raided. Claiming misuse of central agencies, TMC leader said BJP was using the ED to "divert, access or disrupt" the party's campaign-related information.

Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat alleged that Banerjee personally rushed to I-PAC office in Kolkata during the raid, and senior police officers had reached there before her. He recalled an earlier episode when the chief minister had gone to the residence of the then Kolkata Police Commissioner, now the DGP, during a CBI raid in February 2019. Shekhawat further alleged that large-scale corruption had taken place in Bengal in various centrally funded schemes.

Meanwhile, the CBI conducted searches at multiple locations in Bengal in connection with an alleged Rs 7.5 crore bank fraud case in UCO Bank. —*PTI*

52 Chhattisgarh Naxals surrender

BIJAPUR, 15 JAN

As many as 52 Naxalites, 49 of them with a collective bounty of over Rs 1.41 crore, surrendered before the police in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Thursday.

The surrendered cadres, including 21 women, were active in Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee, Andhra-Odisha Border division and Bhamragarh area committee of Maoists. They will be provided an immediate assistance of Rs 50,000 each and rehabilitated. —*PTI*

BSP to go solo in all elections in 2027

LUCKNOW, 15 JAN

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) President Mayawati on Thursday said her party would contest all elections independently, including the 2027 Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls.

Addressing a press conference here on her 70th birthday, Mayawati said it was "more appropriate" for the BSP to fight all elections alone and not enter alliances. "There should be no confusion about this.

The BSP will contest the next Assembly elections in UP alone and form a government with a full majority in the State," she said.

She added alliances could be considered only if a partner could effectively transfer votes, particularly of upper castes, though such a situation would take years. Claiming public sentiment was turning back towards the BSP, Mayawati said party workers were mobilised to form the party's fifth government in the State.

She attacked the BJP, Congress and other "caste-based parties", alleged misuse of electronic voting machines, and accused successive governments of merely renaming welfare schemes launched during BSP rule. She also alleged injustice towards Muslims.

The BSP observed the day across UP as 'Jan Kalyankari Diwas'.

The press conference witnessed panic after smoke filled the room due to a short circuit from a fused bulb. No casualties were reported in the incident, party leaders said. —*PTI*

$20M GOLD HEIST

Canada urges India to extradite gold heist accused

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Canadian authorities have formally sought the extradition of Indian national Preet Panesar, who is a prime suspect in what is described as the largest gold heist in Canada's history — the theft of gold and foreign currency worth about CAD 20 million in 2023.

Panesar, who is 33 year old, is a former Air Canada employee from Brampton. He is accused of orchestrating the April 2023 robbery at Toronto Pearson International Airport.

Nearly 400kg of 99.99 per cent-pure gold, around 6,600 bars, along with about $2.5 million in foreign currency vanished shortly after arriving on a flight from Switzerland.

Police allege Panesar used insider knowledge, which he gained through his airline job to identify, reroute and divert the high-value cargo.

Ontorio, Canada's Peel Regional Police have described him as being "integral" to the operation and "on top of the food chain". A Canada-wide arrest warrant was issued after investigators concluded he fled to India shortly after the robbery.

The aircraft landed, the cargo was unloaded and transferred to a holding facility as per standard procedure, but disappeared sometime thereafter, Peel Regional Police Inspector Stephen Duivesteyn told local Candian media.

Panesar has since been traced to Punjab. India's Enforcement Directorate (ED) is probing the alleged money laundering linked to the heist, with officials stating that proceeds were routed through multiple channels, including the music industry.

Nine suspects have been named in the case so far. Panesar faces charges in Canada including Theft Over $5,000 and Conspiracy to Commit an Indictable Offence. —*PTI*

CPI(M) slams Aisha Potty for joining Congress

T'PURAM, 15 JAN

CPI(M) State Secretary MV Govindan on Thursday attacked former MLA **Aisha Potty** for joining Congress, calling her driven by a "sickness for power".

Potty, a three-time MLA from Kottarakkara elected on a CPI(M) ticket, recently crossed over to Congress. Govindan said she was a member of the party's area committee but rarely took part in organisational work. "She later said she was unwell. Now people have realised what that sickness was," he said.

Accusing Congress of political maneuvering, Govindan alleged that Opposition Leader VD Satheesan was seeking "vulnerable individuals" to create surprises. "They are trying to spring surprises. No surprise is going to happen here," he said.

Potty, who had stayed away from active politics for several years, said that after joining Congress she felt neglected in the CPI(M) and found it difficult to agree with its positions.

Potty entered the Assembly in 2006, won again in 2011, and secured a decisive victory in 2016, with a margin of over 40,000 votes —*PTI*

Two Bishnoi gang shooters held after shootout in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Police have arrested two alleged Lawrence Bishnoi gang shooters after a brief shootout in north Delhi, officials said on Thursday. One suspect was shot in the leg during retaliatory firing, while a constable narrowly escaped injury when a bullet struck his jacket. Police said the men were involved in recent firing incidents at a gym in outer Delhi and an extortion attack on a businessman in east Delhi's Vinod Nagar. Two pistols and cartridges were seized during the operation, police officials confirmed. *—PTI*

Lottery winner abducted, ticket snatched in Kerala

KANNUR, 15 JAN

Police have launched a probe after a man who won a Rs 1 crore lottery was allegedly abducted and his ticket snatched by a gang at Peravoor here, police said on Thursday. Sadique A K, 46, was abducted by a gang, who took away his Sthree Sakthi lottery ticket that had won the Rs 1 crore prize. Police have nabbed one gang member and a search is on for the others. Police said Sadique attempted to sell the ticket to obtain an immediate payout. On Wednesday, Sadique and his friend reached the Manathana area in Peravoor town to hand over the ticket to the gang. However, the gang snatched the ticket from Sadique. Later, his friend was released. *—PTI*

Three children among 6 killed in Himachal fire

SHIMLA, 15 JAN

Six people, including three children, were killed in a house fire in Talangna village of the Sirmaur district in Himachal Pradesh, officials said Thursday. Preliminary findings suggest the blaze started from a fireplace late Wednesday night. The remote village lacks road access, delaying rescue as the wooden house was gutted. The victims included relatives visiting for Boda Tyohar. Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu ordered a probe and relief, while national and state leaders expressed grief. Police said one person suffered serious injuries.*—PTI*

Assam CM who said Zubeen was killed stays mum

GUWAHATI, 15 JAN

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday declined to comment on proceedings in a Singapore court concerning the death Zubeen Garg. Meanwhile, the singer-composer's wife posted an emotional message on social media affirming the family's wait for unravelling the circumstances leading to his death. In a Facebook post, Garima Saikia Garg pledged the family's support to investigations into her husband's death, and urged the Centre to 'monitor' the proceedings in Singapore and take diplomatic steps to ensure that every relevant fact is placed before it. The 52-year-old cultural icon had died while swimming in the sea in Singapore on 19 September, where he had gone to attend the North East India Festival. Singapore Police, which is investigating the death, had said in a coroner's court there on Wednesday that Garg was 'severely intoxicated' and had drowned off Lazarus Island after declining a life jacket. It did not suspect any foul play in his death. A SIT of Assam Police's CID is also probing the incident and has arrested seven persons so far, out of which it has accused four of murder and another of culpable homicide not amounting to murder in the charge-sheet filed before a local court here last month. *— PTI*

We are getting ready for wars, declares Army Chief

New units being set up, trained and equipped: Gen Dwivedi

JAIPUR, 15 JAN

Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi on Thursday said the army is moving forward as a future-ready force preparing for future wars and stressed the need for indigenous equipment, calling it a strategic necessity.

"We are not just addressing current challenges but also preparing for future wars. New structures are being created in this direction, which are being equipped and trained according to future needs," he said.

He said that there has been a clear shift in the Indian Army's thinking in the last few years.

He said that today's parade showcased a beautiful blend of tradition and transformation.

"The Indian Army is fully prepared for any kind of attack. Such preparations will continue to increase in the coming days," he said, adding that the Indian Army will continue to adapt itself with time.

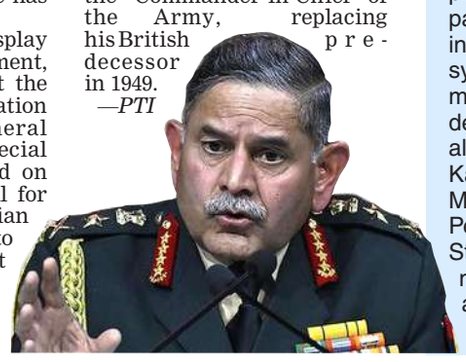
"Operation Sindoor has not ended. It is still on and we will act as the situation demands," he said.

On the recent intrusions of Pakistani drones, he said that the Army has taken care of them and that no damage has been caused by them.

A T-90 Bhishma Main Battle Tank at the Jaipur parade *PHOTO: PTI*

He said that with the display of 'Made in India' equipment, the parade reflected that the foundation of transformation is self-reliance.General Dwivedi said that special emphasis is being placed on resources that are useful for both military and civilian purposes, contributing to the overall development of the country.

Army Day is observed to commemorate the occasion when General K M Cariappa, who later became Field Marshal, took charge as the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, replacing his British predecessor in 1949. *—PTI*



LATEST ARMS PUT ON DISPLAY AT JAIPUR PARADE

Weapons like the BrahMos cruise missile, Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launcher, upgraded BM-21 Grad rocket system, the SMERCH artillery system, and the Universal Rocket Launcher System (Suryastra) were on display at the Army Day parade here today. The indigenous Akashteer system and the Igla man-portable air defence system were also displayed. Kamikaze drones like Mini Harpy, Harop, Peacekeeper, Sky Striker and the Trinetra munition system were also seen. *—PTI*

UNREST IN IRAN

Kashmir students' parents ask Centre to bring them back

SRINAGAR, 15 JAN

The parents of Kashmiri students currently studying in Iran have appealed to the Centre to bring their children back. Scores of concerned parents gathered at the Press Enclave here, urging the government to intervene.

"We appeal to the prime minister, the external affairs minister, the chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, and the Lieutenant Governor to evacuate the students from Iran," a parent told reporters here on Wednesday.

He expressed confidence in the government's ability to conduct an evacuation, recalling previous successful operations in countries like Ukraine and Iran.

The parents claimed that the Indian Embassy in Tehran had advised the students to leave the country on their own.

"They are asking the students to contact their parents and arrange their travel independently. We can connect to our children through ISD calls, but with great difficulty," he added.

In a fresh advisory, the Indian embassy in Tehran has urged all Indians, including students, pilgrims, business persons and tourists, to leave Iran by all available means of transport, including commercial flights.

According to estimates, around 10,000 Indians, including students, are living in Iran.The mother of one student emphasised the difficulty parents are facing in sending travel tickets due to an internet shutdown in Iran.

Meanwhile, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said he spoke to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar about the situation in Iran and was assured that everything is being done to protect the students. *—PTI*

Cases booked over vandalism at Hyderabad temple, protest

HYDERABAD, 15 JAN

Two cases were registered here over the alleged vandalism at a temple and subsequent damage at a shrine during a protest by a mob, police said on Thursday.

Mild tension gripped the Puranapul area here late on Wednesday night after idols in a temple were found desecrated and an attempt was made to tear a banner following which a mob gathered there and resorted to protest raising slogans.

Two police officials sustained minor injuries during stone pelting by the mob protesting the desecration at the temple premises. A two-wheeler was also set on fire during the protest. Some among the mob then allegedly damaged the shrine. Police dispersed the protesters.

Two cases were registered at the Kamatipura Police Station in connection with the incident. The first case was booked for desecration after trespassing into the temple area while the second case pertains to damage at the shrine, police said.

Joint Commissioner of Police, (Law & Order, Co-ordination) Tafseer Iqubal said anti-social elements created disturbance at Puranapul at around 11.30 pm on Wednesday.

"The situation is under control and peaceful. We have some clues and are working on them," he told reporters.

AIMIM president and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi visited the area and spoke to police officials.

Telangana BJP President N Ramchander Rao attacked the ruling Congress over the incident claiming this is not an isolated incident, but was part of a recurring pattern of temple desecrations. *—PTI*

'Potty entered Sabarimala during Venugopal's time'

T'PURAM, 15 JAN

Kerala Excise Minister M B Rajesh on Thursday said that Unnikrishnan Potty, the main accused in the Sabarimala gold loss cases, first became associated with the Lord Ayyappa Temple in 2004 when Congress General Secretary K C Venugopal was the state Devaswom Minister.

That is probably the reason why the Congress was no longer raising the Sabarimala gold loss issue or singing the parody song 'pottiye kettiye' in connection with Potty's entry to the shrine, Rajesh told a TV channel here.

He said that another reason behind the Congress silence on the issue could be the fact that Unnikrishnan Potty was able to meet and converse with Congress leader Sonia Gandhi at her oficial residence in New Delhi. *—PTI*

SETBACK FOR VIJAY

SC asks 'Jana Nayagan' producer to move Madras High Court

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

The release of Vijay-starrer 'Jana Nayagan' has been pushed further with the Supreme Court on Thursday dismissing the producer's plea for a censor certificate and asking them to go back to the Madras High Court for relief on 20 January.

KVN Productions LLP had challenged an interim order of the Madras High Court that stayed a single-judge direction to grant censor board clearance to the Tamil movie, which was slated for a Pongal release on 9 January and is billed to be Vijay's last before his full-fledged entry into politics before TN Assembly polls.

A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Augustine George Masih questioned the pace at which the case was dealt with in the Madras High Court and asked the film producers to approach the division bench for relief on 20 January.

It said the Madras High Court must decide the plea on 20 January itself after senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the producers, said a film is a perishable item, and it would cause "serious injury" if adjudication of the dispute is delayed.

On 9 January, the Madras High Court stayed a single judge's order directing the CBFC to immediately grant a censor certificate to "Jana Nayagan," leaving the fate of actor-turned-politician Vijay's film, which has drawn attention for its political overtones, in limbo. Rohatgi maintained that the entire CBFC process was "mala fide," but the Supreme Court bench reiterated, "We are not inclined to interfere," and urged the division bench to expedite the appeal on 20 January. "Jana Nayagan" remains in limbo following the CBFC's failure to issue timely certification amid political controversy surrounding its release.

On 9 January, the Madras High Court stayed a single judge's order directing the CBFC to immediately grant a censor certificate to 'Jana Nayagan'. *—PTI*

SABHA WANTS NON-HINDU OFFICIALS BANNED FROM HARIDWAR GANGA GHATS

HARIDWAR, 15 JAN

Amid demands for a ban on the entry of non-Hindus at all Ganga ghats under the Haridwar Kumbh area, the Ganga Sabha has said the restriction should also apply to government departments, institutions and media personnel.

Nitin Gautam, the president of the Ganga Sabha, which manages Har Ki Pauri and the surrounding ghats, appealed to the district information officer of Haridwar as well as officials of other departments and institutions to ensure that no non-Hindu enters Har Ki Pauri.

He added that the Haridwar Municipal Corporation bylaws of 1916 are based on these sentiments and prohibit the entry of non-Hindus at Har Ki Pauri and the surrounding Ganga ghats.

Referring to an incident on 13 January at Har Ki Pauri where two youths were seen roaming and making videos dressed in the attire of Arab sheikhs, Gautam said some people are trying to spoil the atmosphere by entering the area in disguise, which will not be tolerated.

He demanded that boards reminding people about the prohibition be installed at Har Ki Pauri and the surrounding ghats.

He also urged all media organisations not to assign non-Hindu journalists to the restricted area for reporting in future. *— PTI*

AI Delhi-NY flight engine sucks in baggage container

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Air India's latest Airbus A350, operating a Delhi-New York flight with over 250 passengers on board, suffered engine damage after ingesting an improperly secured baggage container while taxiing to its parking bay at the Delhi airport, sources said.

The incident occurred when Flight AI101, which returned to New Delhi shortly after take-off after Iran unexpectedly closed its airspace, was taxiing to its parking bay in dense fog. No one was injured in the incident.

Engine ingestion refers to an incident in which a jet engine draws in a foreign object like baggage containers, tools, debris or birds.

Unverified videos and pictures showed damage to the aircraft's right-side engine.

An Air India plane's engine is seen on the left *PHOTO: PTI*

The aircraft has been grounded for repairs, adding to Air India's wide-body aircraft shortage, with one of its six A350s currently out of service.

The DGCA has launched a probe into the incident to ascertain how a foreign object got lodged inside the engine.

Air India said the aircraft has been grounded for a thorough investigation, and there could be potential disruptions on select routes operated with the A350 aircraft.

Flight-tracking data showed that the aircraft (registration VT-JRB) departed Delhi at 2:36 a.m. and was cruising over Ahmedabad when the closure of Iranian airspace came into effect.

With no other alternatives available, the crew decided to return to Delhi.

Air India cancelled two other flights, the New Delhi-Newark and the Mumbai-New York (JFK) too due to the airspace shutdown. *—PTI*

TRAGEDY IN SAI HOSTEL

2 sports trainees found dead in Kerala hostel

KOLLAM, 15 JAN

Two teenage female athletes, both trainees staying at a SAI hostel, were found dead in one of their rooms on Thursday in an apparent suicide pact, the police said.

The deceased are Sandra A, 18, of Chaliyam in Kozhikode district and Vyshnavi V, 15, of Muthakkal in Thiruvananthapuram district.

Police said Sandra was an athletics trainee studying in Plus Two, while Vyshnavi was a kabaddi player and a Class 10 student.

The incident came to light at around 5 AM when hostel inmates noticed that the duo had not reported for the morning session.

When knocks went unanswered, hostel authorities broke open the door and found both girls hanging from ceiling fans.

Police said Vyshnavi was staying in another room but had spent Wednesday night in Sandra's room.

An FIR was registered based on the complaint of SAI centre in charge.

Vaishavi was found hanging from a ceiling fan in room No. 21, the FIR said.

It also stated that Sandra was found hanging from another ceiling fan in the same room on a bed sheet.

A case has been registered at the Kollam East police station under Section 194 of the BNS. Police said that no suicide note had been recovered from the room. Police will record statements from other sportspersons in the hostel, their trainers, and relatives. Mobile phones would also be examined. *—PTI*

Digital arrest: Telecom firms, banks to be liable

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs' (MHA) high-level inter-departmental committee chaired by Special Secretary (Internal Security), has recommended holding banks and telecom companies accountable for digital arrest victims' losses, if it is due to their negligence or shortcomings.

The panel, formed pursuant to Supreme Court directions in a suo motu case by the MHA to deal with the digital arrest scam, met for the first time on 29 December and is deliberating on enforcement gaps, victim compensation, and regulatory reforms. The matter is listed for hearing on 20 January.

The committee is tasked with examining enforcement issues, Amicus Curiae recommendations, legislative gaps under IT Act 2000 Section 46, and suggesting corrective measures like AI fraud detection SOPs and SIM issuance rules.

The panel unanimously agreed that banks and telecom companies must be held accountable if a victim's losses stem from their negligence, fraud or deficiencies. *—PTI*

PONGAL CELEBRATIONS

Women make a vibrant rangoli outside their home in Trichy, Tamil Nadu, on the occasion of Pongal; A family is joined by their furry friend while making pongal in Chikkamagaluru, Karnataka. Pongal is a sweet rice dish cooked with milk and jaggery in an earthen pot and is central to the festivities. In Madurai, people take part in a Jallikattu event (bull-taming sport). At least 57 people were injured at the event ***PHOTOS: PTI/ANI***

'GRAP treats symptoms, not cause of Delhi air pollution'

As Delhi battles severe air pollution every year, environmental experts have said that while emergency measures like the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) provide temporary relief, they have failed to address the root causes, underscoring the need for long-term solutions such as a major overhaul of public transport.

"GRAP is a well-designed policy by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) and functions as an emergency response to some extent, but it has failed to bring about a significant reduction in pollution levels in Delhi," environmentalist Sunil Dahiya told PTI.

Dahiya, who has over 14 years of experience as a strategist and research analyst on environmental issues, claimed that GRAP is based on an "outdated emission inventory," and there is no mechanism to track whether the implemented measures have reduced the overall emission load across the NCR.

GRAP is divided into four stages, each prescribing a set of pollution-control measures aimed at preventing further deterioration of air quality.

"Although tools such as the Decision Support System (DSS) and the Real-Time Advanced Air Source Management Network (R-AASMAN) exist, they are not linked in a way that allows assessment of GRAP's success in reducing absolute emission loads in Delhi-NCR," Dahiya said.

The DSS, developed by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, provides modelling-based inputs to policymakers for managing Delhi's air pollution, while R-AASMAN, developed in collaboration with the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) and IITM, is used for real-time source identification.

Noting that Delhi rarely records 'good' air quality days during the remaining months of the year, Director of the Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group, Bharati Chaturvedi, urged for concrete solutions such as decongestion, improved public transport, an end to biomass and waste burning, and stronger monitoring systems.

GRAP is divided into four stages, each prescribing a set of pollution-control measures aimed at preventing further deterioration of air quality ***PHOTO: PTI***

In November 2025, the CAQM tightened GRAP norms, advancing several pollution-control measures to earlier stages. The revised schedule shifted multiple actions from higher alert stages to lower ones, meaning restrictions are now triggered sooner as the Air Quality Index (AQI) worsens. Under the new framework, several curbs that previously fell under Stage II ('Poor' AQI 201-300) are now enforced at Stage I.

These include uninterrupted power supply to discourage the use of diesel generator sets, deploying additional personnel to streamline traffic at congestion-prone points, issuing pollution alerts through media, and augmenting CNG and electric public transport fleets with higher service frequency and differential fares to promote off-peak travel.

Measures earlier listed under Stage III ('very poor' AQI 301-400) have been moved to Stage II, such as staggering working hours for government offices in Delhi, Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, and Gautam Buddh Nagar.

Similarly, restrictions previously applicable only in Stage IV ('severe+') now apply at Stage III ('severe' AQI 401-450). These include allowing public, municipal and private offices to operate with 50 per cent staff while the remainder work from home.

GRAP was first notified by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in 2017 for implementation through the Supreme Court-mandated Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority.

Delhi recorded the highest annual average PM10 concentration in the country in 2025 at 197 micrograms per cubic metre, according to an analysis.

Meanwhile, Delhi's air quality slipped to 'very poor' category on Wednesday morning, according to data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Five out of 39 monitoring stations recorded 'severe' air quality at 6am, while 32 stations remained in the 'very poor' category.

According to the CPCB classification, an AQI between 0 and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'.

OVER 9,000 DEATHS IN DELHI

New Delhi recorded 9,211 deaths due to respiratory diseases in 2024, up from 8,801 in 2023, continuing an upward trend seen over the past few years, according latest official data released by the Delhi government. Common types of respiratory diseases include asthma, pneumonia, lung cancer and Tuberclosis, often causing breathing related issues. *—PTI*

LETTERS

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SALAR سالار

Wikipedia unveils new AI deals on 25th birthday

Wikipedia unveiled new business deals with a slew of artificial intelligence companies on Thursday as it marked its 25th anniversary.

The online crowdsourced encyclopedia revealed that it has signed licensing deals with AI companies, including Amazon, Meta Platforms, Perplexity, Microsoft and France's Mistral AI.

Wikipedia is one of the last bastions of the early internet, but that original vision of a free online space has been clouded by the dominance of Big Tech platforms and the rise of generative AI chatbots trained on content scraped from the web.

Aggressive data collection methods by AI developers, including from Wikipedia's vast repository of free knowledge, have raised questions about who ultimately pays for the AI boom.

The nonprofit that runs the site signed Google as one of its first customers in 2022 and announced other agreements last year with smaller AI players like search engine Ecosia.

The new deals will help one of the world's most popular websites monetise heavy traffic from AI companies. They're paying to access Wikipedia content "at a volume and speed designed specifically for their needs," the Wikimedia Foundation said.

It did not provide financial or other details.

While AI training has sparked legal battles elsewhere over copyright and other issues, Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales said he welcomes it.

"I'm very happy personally that AI models are training on Wikipedia data because it's human curated," Wales told The Associated Press in an interview. "I wouldn't really want to use an AI that's trained only on X, you know, like a very angry AI," Wales said, referring to billionaire Elon Musk's social media platform. Wales said the site wants to work with AI companies, not block them. But "you should probably chip in and pay for your fair share of the cost that you're putting on us."

Jimmy Wales, founder of Wikipedia ***PHOTO: PTI***

The Wikimedia Foundation, a nonprofit group that runs Wikipedia, last year urged AI developers to pay for access through its enterprise platform and said human traffic had fallen 8 per cent. Meanwhile, visits from bots, sometimes disguised to evade detection, were heavily taxing its servers as they scrape masses of content to feed AI large language models.

The findings highlighted shifting online trends as search engine AI overviews and chatbots summarise information instead of sending users to sites by showing them links.

Wikipedia is the ninth most-visited site on the internet. It has more than 65 million articles in 300 languages that are edited by some 2,50,000 volunteers.

It costs money to maintain servers and other infrastructure that allows both individuals and tech companies to "draw data from Wikipedia," said Iskander, who's stepping down on January 20, and will be replaced by Bernadette Meehan.

The bulk of Wikipedia's funding comes from 8 million donors, most of them individuals. Editors and users could benefit from AI in other ways.

While AI isn't good enough to write Wikipedia entries from scratch, it could, for example, be used to update dead links by scanning the surrounding text and then searching online to find other sources.

AI could also improve the Wikipedia search experience, by evolving from the traditional keyword method to more of a chatbot style, Wales said. "You can imagine a world where you can ask the Wikipedia search box a question and it will quote to you from Wikipedia," he said.

A notable source of criticism is Musk, who last year launched his own AI-powered rival, Grokipedia. He has criticised Wikipedia for being filled with "propaganda" and urged people to stop donating to the site.

Wales said he doesn't consider Grokipedia a "real threat" to Wikipedia because it's based on large language models, which are the troves of online text that AI systems are trained on. *—PTI*

BJP to sharpen 'lost industry' narrative in WB with Modi's Singur rally

The BJP seemed all set to sharpen its narrative about industrialisation of West Bengal by organising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 18 January rally at the Singur site, where the abandoned Tata Nano factory once stood, in a bid to make a renewed push around the state's missed economic opportunities, ahead of the high-stakes assembly polls.

Gearing up to go full throttle on its poll campaigns to take on the TMC, BJP leaders are hoping that Modi's address in Singur in Hooghly district would include a generic vision on the path to attract big-ticket investments to Bengal, piggybacking on the lasting perception that the state has remained industry-starved since the exit of the small car project.

The site chosen by the party for the PM's rally, months ahead of the assembly polls, is overtly symbolic and best suited for the party's messaging to debunk the TMC regime's performance in attracting business and share its counter vision to reviving industry in Bengal, if it comes to power.

"Almost no farming activity happens at Singur's Nano site because the character of the land was changed from agricultural to industrial. In Bengal, we need a comprehensive land policy to attract heavy industry, which is the only way to retain homegrown merit and stop brain drain and forced migration of the workforce. That policy should include making farmers direct stakeholders in industries for which they would need to give up land, if required," state BJP president Samik Bhattacharya told PTI.

Rejecting the "agriculture-industry coexistence theory" promoted by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Bhattacharya said big industries can only be set up on farmland, as 82 per cent of land in the state is held by small farmers.

"Bengal enjoys a unique topographical advantage of rivers, a sea and two immensely mineral-rich states in its neighbourhood. Investors can be easily lured here if we can render the state's lower judiciary free of political pressure to extend impartial judgments for business houses during litigation," he said.

Intense farmers' protests, led by the then opposition TMC, against forcible acquisition of fertile agricultural land by the Buddhedeb Bhattacharjee-led Left Front government escalated to violence, arson and clashes, forcing Tata Motors to pull the plug on the Singur project in 2008 and relocate it to Gujarat when Modi was the CM there.

BJP leaders are hoping that PM Narendra Modi's address in Singur would include a generic vision on the path to attract big-ticket investments to Bengal ***PHOTO: PTI***

"I once mentioned that if somebody puts a gun to my head, you either pull the trigger or you take the gun away. Because I have not moved my head, I think Ms Banerjee has pulled the trigger," an exasperated Ratan Tata, then Tata Sons chairman, had said, while officially announcing the Singur pullout on 3 October, 2008, identifying Banerjee as the sole cause for his decision.

The exit marked a watershed moment and reshaped Bengal's politics and industrial landscape, ultimately catapulting Banerjee to power in 2011 by ending a three-decade Left rule while simultaneously leaving the state struggling to shed its anti-industry image.

BJP MLA and economist Ashok Lahiri, while insisting that the abandoned factory plot in Singur can only be salvaged by fresh industrialisation, maintained that granting shares to landholders in industry could "complicate matters".

"Instead," Lahiri suggested, "The farmers owning small plots can form their own cooperative or even a company and consider giving amalgamated land parcels to investors on long-term lease or offer them up for sale."

"It is a win-win situation for both sides, especially in Singur, where time has proved that the proposition to revive agriculture on a plot where land usage had already changed due to the building of factory sheds was unworkable to begin with," he said.

- The BJP seemed all set to sharpen its narrative about industrialisation of West Bengal by organising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 18 January rally at the Singur site, where the abandoned Tata Nano factory once stood, in a bid to make a renewed push around the state's missed economic opportunities

The TMC dominated Singur's political map for over 25 years, with the party registering back-to-back wins in state polls since 2001.

The party, however, remained dismissive of the renewed focus on Singur.

State minister Chandrima Bhattacharya recently said, "The highest court said land acquisition in Singur was wrong. Where were these leaders when farmers were beaten, and land was forcibly taken?"

CPI(M)'s young gun Srijan Bhattacharya, who unsuccessfully contested the Singur seat in 2021, said agricultural output of Bengal's fragmented land parcels has "exhausted longevity" and that there is no shortcut to land acquisition other than making owners parties to the takeover process. Bhattacharya questioned the BJP's "credibility" in raking up the industry narrative before the polls on the grounds that the party had thrown its weight behind Banerjee's anti-factory agitation all those years ago.

A section of industry insiders in the state said that while the Singur experience may have marked a pivotal point for investment reluctance, the "final nail in that coffin" was driven in March 2025, when the TMC government enacted a law to retrospectively cancel industrial incentives, promised since 1993, citing lack of funds for welfare schemes.

"Unless a party addresses this key issue, no amount of promises can revive investor confidence in the state in the wake of losses some major companies are suffering because of this new policy," an entrepreneur said, requesting anonymity.

In its pre-poll 15-year performance report card, the TMC government, however, claimed that Bengal is among the country's leading states in the number of registered companies, with an average profit hike of 546 per cent per factory between 2011 and 2024. *—PTI*

Syrian military to start evacuation of east Aleppo

ALEPPO, 15 JAN

Syria's military said it would open a corridor on Thursday for civilians to evacuate an area of Aleppo province that has seen a military buildup following intense clashes between government and Kurdish-led forces. The Army's statement made late on Wednesday, said civilians would be able to evacuate through the "humanitarian corridor" from 9am to 5pm on Thursday. It appeared to signal plans for an offensive in the towns of Deir Hafer and Maskana and surrounding areas, about 60km east of Aleppo city. The military called on the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and other armed groups to withdraw to the other side of the Euphrates River, to the east of the contested zone. Dozens have already been killed in the recent clashes. *—PTI*

FBI raids WaPo scribe's home for reporting on Don

WASHINGTON, 15 JAN

FBI agents searched a Washington Post reporter's home on Wednesday as part of a leak investigation into a Pentagon contractor accused of taking home classified information, the Justice Department said. Hannah Natanson, who has been covering President Donald Trump's transformation of the federal government, had a phone, two laptops and a Garmin watch seized in the search of her Virginia home. Natanson has reported extensively on the federal workforce and recently published a piece describing how she gained hundreds of new sources — leading one colleague to call her "the federal government whisperer." While classified documents investigations aren't unusual, the search of a reporter's home marks a significant escalation. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Israel to honour Charlie Kirk for his antisemitism fight

JERUSALEM, 15 JAN

Israel will honour late Conservative activist Charlie Kirk for combating antisemitism at a conference later in January. This comes four months after Kirk was assassinated while speaking at a US university. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said on that Kirk will be awarded at the International Conference on Combating Antisemitism in Jerusalem. Many pro-Israeli leaders are expected to attend, including Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama and former Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz. This will be the second time Israel hosts the conference, "dedicated to confronting antisemitism and Holocaust denial." Kirk was a staunch supporter of Israel. *—PTI*

2 killed in Thailand after another crane collapses

NAKHON RATCHASIMA, 15 JAN

A construction crane collapsed onto an elevated road near Bangkok, killing two people on Thursday, a day after a train derailment in northeastern Thailand that killed 32 people. The crane collapsed at part of the road project in Samut Sakhon province, trapping two vehicles in the wreckage, according to the government's Public Relations Department. Transport Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn said to reporterson Thai TV Channel 7 that two people had died. It was unclear if anyone else had been trapped in the wreckage. There was uncertainty about the number of victims because the site is still considered too dangerous for search and rescue teams to enter, said a search and rescue worker with Ruamkatanyu Foundation. *—PTI*

Don says Iran won't execute protesters

Don appears to backtrack on military intervention

WASHINGTON, 15 JAN

US President Donald Trump said that he's been told, Iran's plans to execute demonstrators have stopped, even as Tehran said it will fast track executions in its crackdown on protesters.

Trump had earlier said that Iran was "behaving badly" and reiterated his threats to intervene militarily if it executed or killed protesters.

Sources say at 2,615 people have been killed since protests began on 28 December over the fall of Iran's currency.

On Wednesday, Trump said: "We've been told that the killing in Iran is stopping. I've been told on good authority there's no execution plan."

Trump did not specify where he received the information."I hope it's true," he added. "Who knows?"

When asked if that meant he was not planning to take any action against the Iranian government, Trump said: "We're going to watch it and see what the process is. But we were given a very good statement by people that are aware of what's going on."

On Wednesday, Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei, Iran's judiciary chief, said that the government must act quickly to punish over 18,000 detained through rapid trials and executions.

Meanwhile the protests in Iran appear to be dying down, witnesses said. With security forces cracking down on the demonstrators, and a nationwide communication blackout largely in place, people said that the bonfires have gone out and the gunfire appears to have faded.

Meanwhile, amid a prominent military buildup in the region, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told Trump not to "repeat the same mistake that you did in June", a reference to Iran's 12-day war with Israel.

"You destroyed the facilities, the machines, but the technology cannot be bombed. And the determination also cannot be bombed," Araghchi told Fox News. *—Agencies*

Witnesses say that the widespread rallies in Iran have been diminishing following the crackdown by the government **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

IRAN MIGHT NOT ACCEPT PAHLAVI, SAYS TRUMP

PARIS, 15 JAN

Trump said Iran's exiled crown prince Reza Pahlavi was "nice" but didn't have support within Iran. Trump's comments come as Senator Lindsey Graham, met Pahlavi.

"I don't know if Iran would accept his leadership, if so that's fine with me," he said.

Pahlavi has lived outside Iran since the 1970s, after his father, the last Shah of Iran, was toppled. Pahlavi's support for Western nations, left him sidelined in Iranian politics.

Recent demonstrations have protesters holding his photo, demanding he be the next leader.

On Wednesday, Pahlavi outlined his "free Iran" vision if he were to take charge. Key points include giving up nuclear ambitions, end support for "terrorists" groups, as well as normalise relations with the US and Israel.

After meeting Pahlavi, Graham posted "make Iran great again". *—Agencies*

US MOVES CARRIER FROM SOUTH CHINA SEA TO IRAN

The Pentagon stated that it is redeploying a US carrier strike group from the South China Sea to the US Central Command area of responsibility, which includes the Middle East. The carrier strike group, centred on an aircraft carrier and supported by multiple warships, including an attack submarine, will need around a week to take position. The aircraft carrier is believed to be the USS Abraham Lincoln. Earlier, the US had asked personnel in several of its military bases to evacuate, while placing others on high alert. Iran responded by threatening to strike the dozen of US bases in the region, including in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

IRAN SAYS 'WON'T MISS THIS TIME' WITH DON'S ASSASSINATION PICK

Iran's State TV reportedly aired an ominous message, saying "this time the bullet won't miss", with footage of the assassination against Trump. The Republican was shot at when electioneering in 2024.

US sells $500M Venezuelan oil, holds money in Qatar

NEW YORK, 15 JAN

The US has made its first sale of Venezuelan oil, valued at USD 500 million, officials sources said. While it was unclear who the oil was sold to, an official said that the revenue from the transaction was being held in a Qatar account controlled by the US government.

This comes less than two weeks after the US arrested Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro. US President Donald Trump then announced that Washington would take control of Venezuela's oil reserves. Trump has also signed an executive order blocking US courts or creditors from seizing any revenue that the US collects from Venezuelan oil and holds in American Treasury accounts.

Trump also said that the oil firms would invest at least $100 billion to rebuild Venezuela's battered energy sector — though it is not clear where exactly that number came from.

- Trump has signed an order blocking courts or creditors from seizing any revenue that the US collects from Venezuelan oil.

Meanwhile, Trump will meet Nobel Peace Prize Winner María Corina Machado at the White House on Thursday. The Venezuelan Opposition leader is widely considered to have won the 2024 elections. However, after the arrest of Maduro, Trump dismissed Machado's credibility and favoured Delcy Rodríguez to take over as acting President.

Trump later reposted images on Truth Social where he declared himself 'Acting President' of Venezuela and Secretary of State Marco Rubio the next President of Cuba. *—Agencies*

Trump wishes to conquer Greenland, says Denmark

WASHINGTON/NUUK, 15 JAN

US President Donald Trump wants Greenland, Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen said after Greenland Foreign Minister Vivian Motzfeldt met with Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President JD Vance in the White House.

Denmark and Greenland rejected any prospect acquisition, but agreed to form a working group to address American security concerns in the Arctic.

Rasmussen said a "key disagreement" remained after the meeting.

"We agreed that it makes sense to sit down to explore whether there are possibilities to consider President's concerns, while respecting the red lines of the Kingdom of Denmark," he said, stressing Greenland would remain within the Danish realm and under NATO's Article 5 protections.

Denmark said military presence in and around Greenland, backed by NATO allies, France and Germany are contributing troops. *— Agencies*

NOT PUTIN, IT'S ZELENSKYY DERAILING END-OF-WAR PEACE DEAL: TRUMP

WASHINGTON, 15 JAN

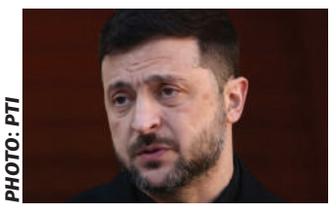


PHOTO: PTI

US President Donald Trump said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was the reason that a peace deal had not been reached to end Russia's nearly four-year invasion.

Trump told Reuters that Russian President Vladimir is "ready to make a deal", but "I think Ukraine is less ready" to do so.

Asked why US-led negotiations to end the war have gone cold, Trump replied with one word: "Zelenskyy".

Ukraine has said it would not concede territory to Russia for any peace deal, something that Trump has been urging Zelenskyy to agree to.

The Kremlin agreed with Trump's assertion.

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the time has come for Zelenskyy to make a decision.

ENERGY EMERGENCY

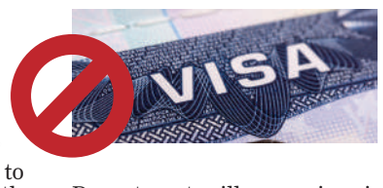
Zelenskyy said there was an emergency in the country's energy sector "caused by the Russian airstrikes and the harsh winter weather".

Recent Russian airstrikes have cut power in several regions of Ukraine, including the capital Kyiv, with tempratures plummetting to -15 C.

Officials said the outages as the longest and broadest since the war began. *— Agencies*

Visa ban on 75 nations for immigration, not tourist, workers

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 15 JAN



The Trump administration's latest pause on immigrant visas for people from 75 "high-risk" countries does not apply to tourist or work visas, the State Department said. It will impact those wishing to live in the US.

Effective 21 January, the Department will pause immigrant visa issuances to applicants from several countries, including Bangladesh and Pakistan.

An immigrant visa (IV) is issued to a person "wishing to live permanently in the United States." Non-immigrant visas will not be affected.

The State Department said those from affected countries may still apply, but no visas will be issued during the pause. The Department added that no immigrant visas have been revoked under the guidance. *—PTI*

Supreme Court defers tariffs case

The Supreme Court deferred decision on if a President can impose tariffs via emergency powers. The court didn't say when it would take up the matter again. It was expected to uphold or strike down Trump's tariffs- could upend global relations. Trump had said that if the court strikes his tariffs, then the country is "screwed".

Mental health, addiction funds cut

The Trump administration made sweeping cuts to substance abuse and mental health programmes across the country. The government cancelled some 2,000 grants representing nearly $2 billion in funding. Meanwhile, US overdose deaths fell in 2024 and 2025 – the largest drop in decades, the government said.

Japan, Philippines defence pact amid China tensions

MANILA, 15 JAN

Japan and the Philippines signed a key defence logistics pact on Thursday, enabling the tax-free exchange of fuel, ammunition, and supplies during joint training drills.

Aimed at countering China's regional assertiveness and improving disaster response. The Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement was signed in Manila by Japan's Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Philippines' Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro.

The military agreement, pending Japanese legislative approval, is the latest effort to deepen the countries' security alliance.

Japan has faced rising political, trade, and security tensions with China, following Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's remark that any Chinese action against Taiwan could prompt Japanese intervention. Both Japan and the Philippines have also clashed with Beijing over territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas, tensions that risk drawing in the US, a treaty ally of both nations.

CARNEY IN CHINA

Meanwhile, during Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's first state visit to China both Beijing and Ottawa signalled that an era of better relations would start.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, meeting his Canadian counterpart on Thursday, described Carney's visit as a turning, a Chinese Foreign Ministry statement said.

Carney's mission is significant due to US President Donald Trump high tariffs. At least 75 per cent of Canada's exports go to the US, and Carney wants to double non-US exports over the next decade.

Carney met with Chinese Premier Li Qiang and will meet President Xi Jinping on Friday. Carney highlighted the "speed of progress" in restoring trust as well as cooperation. *— Agencies*

Palestinians carry plastic jerrycans filled with water amid stormy weather at a displacement camp in Gaza City **PHOTO: PTI**

Gaza enters Phase 2 of ceasefire plan: US

WASHINGTON, 15 JAN

Gaza is entering Phase 2 of a ceasefire plan brokered with US backing, Washington said on Wednesday, outlining steps to disarm Hamas, rebuild the enclave and install a technocratic administration.

Trump envoy Steve Witkoff said on X the deal had moved into Phase 2 after two years of war, including the creation of a committee of Palestinian experts to manage daily affairs. He warned Hamas must immediately return the final Israeli hostage, or face "serious consequences".

Egypt, Turkey and Qatar welcomed the move, naming Ali Shaath, a former Palestinian Authority deputy minister, to lead the committee, calling it an "important development" for stability and humanitarian relief.

Netanyahu says the announced start of Gaza ceasefire's next phase is as largely symbolic.

Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem said the group was ready to hand over Gaza's administration and discuss the resistance weapons.

Major hurdles remain, including deploying an international security force, disarming Hamas and funding reconstruction, which the UN estimates will exceed $50 billion.

Israel said efforts to recover the remains of Ran Gvili remain top priority. *—PTI*

DAYS AFTER ICE KILLS GOOD

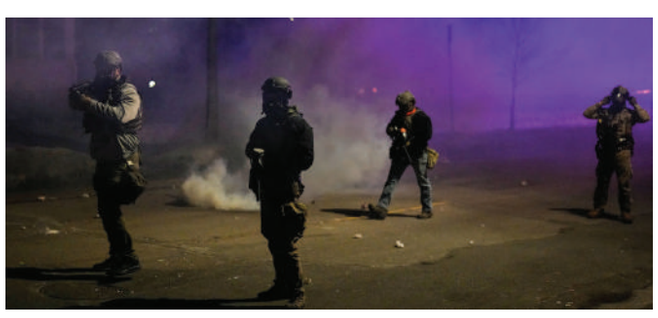
Feds shoot man in Minneapolis protest

MINNEAPOLIS, 15 JAN

A federal officer shot a civilian in the leg while attempting an arrest on Wednesday, in Minneapolis, 7km from where an ICE agent had fatally shot Renee Good on 7 January.

While attempting to arrest the civilian, two others attacked the officer with a shovel and a broom handle. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said the suspect was a Venezuelan national in the US illegally.

DHS added that two other individuals who joined the attack are now in custody. Minneapolis officials said the man who was shot in the leg is hospitalized with non-life-threatening injuries.



Law enforcement officers stand amid tear gas at the scene of a reported shooting on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

On Wednesday, officers in gas masks fired tear gas into a crowd in north Minneapolis. Such deployments of chemical irritants on protests have become common in the city since the fatal shooting of Renee Good by an immigration agent. Local leaders say the heavy law enforcement presence violates free speech and other constitutional rights.

The DHS says it has made more than 2,000 arrests in Minnesota since early December and vows not to back down. Meanwhile, a federal judge has given the Trump administration more time to respond to a request to suspend its immigration crackdown in the state. *—PTI*

Oil prices fall 4% as Trump softens stance on Iran

Trump backs away from threats of striking Iran

HONG KONG, 15 JAN

Oil prices on Thursday fell by over 4 per cent, nearly USD 3 a barrel, on Thursday after US President Donald Trump said he was told "on good authority" that plans for executions in Iran have stopped, even as Tehran signalled fast trials and executions ahead in its crackdown on protesters.

US benchmark crude fell USD 2.73, or 4.5 per cent, to USD 59.13 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, shed USD 2.94, or 4.4 per cent, to USD 63.58 per barrel.

According to the sources, the crude prices broke the 200-moving averages, going as high as USD 66.82 per barrel earlier this week, helped by the ongoing protest in Iran, additional 25 per cent tariffs by the US on buyers of Iranian oil and possible intervention by the US after reports of a massive death toll.

After the comments made by Trump on Wednesday, oil prices fell sharply, the source said.

Iran accounts for 3 per cent of global oil production and exports around 2 million barrels per day (bpd). Most of Iran's oil exports go to China, sources said.

Iran also controls the Strait of Hormuz, which is an important and narrow waterway used to transport about 30 per cent of the world's seaborne oil each day. During regional tension, the Strait is at the centre of attention, it said.

According to traders, the focus of the market on geopolitical risks has quickly moved to the signs of enough supply. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

- Iran accounts for 3 per cent of global oil production and exports around 2 million barrels per day (bpd). Most of Iran's oil exports go to China. Iran also controls the Strait of Hormuz through whic 30 per cent of global sea-borne oil is transported each day.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Cumulatively, during April-December this fiscal, the country's merchandise exports rose 2.44 per cent to **USD 330.29 BILLION**

Exports rise 1.87% to $38.5B in December

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

The country's exports rose 1.87 per cent to USD 38.5 billion in December 2025 despite global economic uncertainties, though an increase in imports led to a marginal widening of the trade deficit to USD 25 billion.

Imports rose by 8.7 per cent to USD 63.55 billion during the month under review, according to government data released on Thursday.

Trade deficit, difference between imports and exports, stood at USD 25.04 billion in December 2025 as against USD 24.53 billion in November last year and USD 22 billion in December 2024.

Cumulatively, during April-December this fiscal, the country's merchandise exports rose 2.44 per cent to USD 330.29 billion.

Imports grew by 5.9 per cent to USD 578.61 billion, leaving a trade deficit of USD 248.32 billion during the nine-month period of 2025-26.

Briefing the media on the latest data, **Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal** said that despite global uncertainties, India's exports are recording positive growth.

Going by the trend, "we expect that the total exports (goods and services) are likely to cross USD 850 billion this fiscal," Agarwal said.

The main sectors that led to an increase in shipments included engineering, electronics, marine, and pharmaceuticals.

India's exports to the US, China, and the UAE are rising at a steady rate. *—PTI*

Silver hits Rs 2.9L/kg, gold scales Rs 1.47L/10 grams

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Silver prices extended their record-breaking run, jumping Rs 3,000 to hit a record of Rs 2,89,000 per kg in the national capital on Thursday, while gold advanced to a new peak of Rs 1,47,300 per 10g amid sustained buying by stockists and jewellers, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Extending gains for the fifth consecutive day, the white precious metal increased Rs 3,000, or 1.05 per cent, to hit a fresh peak of Rs 2,89,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes). In addition, gold prices continued their upward march for the fifth straight day, rising Rs 800 to a fresh record of Rs 1,47,300 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes) on Thursday. Meanwhile, both gold and silver saw mild corrections in the international markets after retreating from their record highs. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Flipkart gets new Compliance Officer ahead of IPO

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Walmart-owned Flipkart has appointed Jane Duke as its chief ethics and compliance officer as it strengthens governance ahead of an initial public offering. Duke will report to Walmart International CECO Chris Cyrenne and work with Flipkart Group CEO Kalyan Krishnamurthy. She brings 30 years of experience in public-sector enforcement and corporate compliance, most recently serving as Vice President and Associate General Counsel at Tyson Foods. Earlier, she spent over a decade at the US Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Arkansas, including four years as US Attorney. The appointment comes as Flipkart moves towards an Indian domicile after the NCLT approved the merger of eight Singapore-based entities into its Bengaluru arm*—PTI*

Waaree Renewable posts strong Q3 profit surge

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Waaree Renewable Technologies Ltd (WRTL) more than doubled its net profit to Rs 120.19 crore in the December quarter, compared with Rs 53.48 crore a year earlier, driven by strong revenue growth. Profit after tax rose 124.74 per cent year on year. Revenue surged 136.18 per cent to Rs 851.06 crore, up from Rs 360.35 crore in the corresponding quarter last year. The company's unexecuted order book stands at 2.92 GWp, to be executed over the next 12 to 15 months, while its bidding pipeline remains robust at 29 GWp. The board has approved capital expenditure for a 120 MWp solar power park in Buldhana, Maharashtra. WRTL is a Waaree Group subsidiary focused on solar EPC and project development. *—PTI*

Prestige Q3 sales bookings jump to Rs 4,184 cr

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Prestige Estates Projects Ltd has reported a strong improvement in sales bookings, supported by steady demand for housing. In a regulatory filing, the Bengaluru-based developer said sales bookings rose 39 per cent year on year to Rs 4,183.6 crore in the third quarter of the current financial year. Pre-sales for the first nine months of FY26 more than doubled to Rs 22,327.3 crore. Chairman and Managing Director Irfan Razack said the performance reflected robust market demand and customer confidence in the Prestige brand. Sales volume stood at 2.99 million sq ft in the October–December quarter and 16.95 million sq ft in the first nine months. The company sold 1,811 units in Q3.*—PTI*

Taiwan chipmaker's profit jumps 35%

HONG KONG, 15 JAN

Taiwan's TSMC plans to increase its capital spending by 40 per cent this year after a 35 per cent jump in its net profit for the latest quarter thanks.

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp., a major supplier to companies including Nvidia and Apple, reported a net profit of 506 billion new Taiwan dollars ($16 billion) for the October-December quarter, a 35 per cent surge from a year earlier.

The world's largest computer chip maker's revenue in the last quarter increased 21 per cent from a year earlier to more than 1.046 trillion new Taiwan dollars ($33 billion).

It plans to boost its capital expenditure budget to $52 billion-$56 billion for 2026, up from about $40 billion last year. The company's shares have climbed over 8 per cent since the beginning of the year, reflecting its strong position in the AI-driven market.

The company expects its business to be supported by demand of its technologies.

With a market capitalisation -- total outstanding shares times share price -- of about $1.4 trillion, it is Asia's most valuable company.

TSMC has pledged around $165 billion of investments in the US and has said it's speeding up construction of new plants in Arizona. US fearing an invasion by China wants the company to open its plants in Arizona. . *—PTI*

Reliance Infra Q3 FY26 profit up 9.9%

MUMBAI, 15 JAN

Reliance Industrial Infrastructure Limited (RIIL), a group company of Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), reported a 9.9 per cent year-on-year (YoY) rise in its consolidated net profit for the third quarter of FY26.

The company said in its results declared on Wednesday that RIIL's consolidated net profit stood at Rs 3.01 crore in Q3 FY26, as compared to Rs 2.74 crore recorded in the corresponding quarter of the previous financial year. The improvement in profit came despite largely stable income levels during the quarter.

The company's total income for Q3 FY26 stood at Rs 18.48 crore, which was broadly in line with the Rs 18.60 crore reported in Q3 FY25 on a year-on-year basis. The near-flat income indicates stable business activity during the reporting period.

On a standalone basis, Reliance Industrial Infrastructure Limited also reported a consistent performance. Standalone total income for the quarter was Rs 18.48 crore, similar to Rs 18.60 crore recorded in the same quarter last year.

Standalone net profit for Q3 FY26 came in at Rs 2.59 crore, as compared to Rs 2.48 crore in Q3 FY25, reflecting a modest year-on-year improvement.

The difference between Standalone and Consolidated profit is that while Standalone profit is defined for a single company's performance, Consolidated profit combines the parent company and all its subsidiaries into one financial picture.

The company currently does not have any expansion plans on the anvil. *—ANI*

Biocon raises Rs 4,150 cr via QIP issue

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Biotech firm Biocon on Thursday said it has raised Rs 4,150 crore through a Qualified Institutions Placement (QIP) process.

The initiative saw issuance of 1,12,664,585 equity shares of face value Rs 5 each to eligible qualified institutional buyers at the issue price of Rs 368.35 per share, the Bengaluru-based firm said in a regulatory filing.

The QIP, which opened on 12 January and closed on 14 January, attracted strong investor interest from a broad mix of domestic and international participants, reflecting robust confidence in the company's growth prospects, it added.

The company recently announced its board has approved a strategic corporate action to acquire all remaining minority shareholdings, including Viatris' stake, thereby making Biocon Biologics a wholly owned subsidiary.

The integration marks a pivotal step in Biocon's journey to lead in the therapeutic areas of diabetes, oncology, and immunology through a differentiated portfolio of biosimilars, insulins, generics and peptides (GLP-1s), it stated.

The integration process is expected to be completed no later than 31 March, 2026, it added.Biocon shares were trading 0.46 per cent up at Rs 379.05 apiece on BSE. *—PTI*

The initiative saw issuance of 1,12,664,585 equity shares of face value **RS 5 EACH**

Google unveils Personal Intelligence feature in Gemini

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Google CEO Sundar Pichai

Google has introduced a new feature called Personal Intelligence in its Gemini app, designed to offer users a more helpful and personalised experience.

Google shared the update in a social media post, stating that the move addresses one of the top requests from users of the Gemini app. With Personal Intelligence, users can now securely connect the app to select Google apps to receive more relevant and customised responses.

The new feature is designed to bring together advanced reasoning capabilities and the ability to retrieve specific information from connected sources. The users can fully control their personal data and app connections. *—PTI*

A NASA video shows astronaut Zena Cardman being helped out of the SpaceX Crew-11 capsule after they re-entered earth **PHOTO: PTI**

NASA conducts medical evacuation for 4 austronauts

CAPE CANAVERAL, 15 JAN

An astronaut in need of doctors' care departed the International Space Station with three crewmates on Wednesday in NASA's first medical evacuation.

The four returning astronauts from the US, Russia and Japan are aiming for an early Thursday morning splashdown in the Pacific near San Diego with SpaceX.

"Our timing of this departure is unexpected," NASA astronaut Zena Cardman said before the return trip, "but what was not surprising to me was how well this crew came together as a family to help each other and just take care of each other."

Officials refused to identify the astronaut who needed care last week and would not divulge the health concerns.

The ailing astronaut is "stable, safe and well cared for," outgoing space station commander Mike Fincke said earlier this week via social media.

Launched in August, Cardman, Fincke, Japan's Kimiya Yui and Russia's Oleg Platonov should have remained on the space station until late February. But on 7 January, NASA abruptly cancelled the next day's spacewalk by Cardman and Fincke and later announced the crew's early return. *—PTI*

- Officials refused to identify the astronaut who needed care land would not divulge the health concerns. The ailing astronaut is "stable and safe," space station commander Mike Fincke said.

AMID BANS & WARNINGS

Grok blocked from undressing images of people: X

BANGKOK, 15 JAN

Elon Musk's AI chatbot Grok won't be able to edit photos to portray real people in revealing clothing in places where that is illegal, according to a statement posted on X.

The announcement late Wednesday followed a global backlash over sexualised images of women and children, including bans and warnings by some governments.

The pushback included an investigation announced Wednesday by the state of California into the proliferation of non-consensual sexually explicit material produced using Grok.

Initially, media queries about the problem drew only the response, "legacy media lies."

Musk's company, xAI, now says it will geoblock content if it violates laws in a particular place.

PHOTO: X

"We have implemented technological measures to prevent the Grok account from allowing the editing of images of real people in revealing clothing such as bikinis, underwear and other revealing attire," it said.

The rule applies to all users, including paid subscribers, who have access to more features.

xAI also has limited image creation or editing to paid subscribers only "to ensure that individuals who attempt to abuse the Grok account to violate the law or our policies can be held accountable."

Grok's "spicy mode" had allowed users to create explicit content, leading to a backlash from governments worldwide. *—PTI*

UNION BUDGET 2026

Agri sector seeks better tech and climate action

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Industry leaders are making a strong pitch for increased investments in digital infrastructure, climate-resilient farming practices, and technology adoption in FY27 to transform the agriculture sector.

With agriculture and allied sectors support about 45 per cent of India's workforce, while contribute only around 18 per cent to the gross value added, industry voices say Budget 2026-27 presents a critical opportunity to reposition the sector as an engine of economic growth.

Heritage Foods Ltd Executive Director Brahmani Nara stressed on subsidised access to quality feed and chromosome-sorted semen to boost animal productivity, expand veterinary college capacity and increase capital subsidies for minidairy units.

Amit Vatsyayan, leader, GPS-Agriculture, Livelihood, Social and Skills at EY India emphasised the need for scaling green infrastructure and climate-resilient irrigation through investments in micro-irrigation, watershed management, aquifer recharge and renewable-powered agri assets.

Vatsyayan suggested adapting to cluster-based farmer schools anchored in Follow On Public Offers (FPOs) and Krishi Vigyan Kendras to accelerate technology adoption.

MapMyCrop CEO Swapnil Jadhav urged the government to champion digital infrastructure and seamless credit linkages to propel precision agriculture at scale.

"Agri-drones, IoT sensors, and AI-driven analytics hold transformative potential to elevate yields, optimise water and fertiliser use, and fortify climate resilience for 140 million farm holdings," he said. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: PTI

Pune Grand Tour cycling: Dhoni named ambassador

PUNE, 15 JAN

Former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni was on Thursday named ambassador of the Bajaj Pune Grand Tour, a first-ever UCI 2.2 category multi-stage road race cycling event in the country, to be held here from January 19 to 23.The five-day Continental Road Cycling Race for Men will wind through a 437km route across the Deccan Plateau and Sahyadri Range, featuring sharp bends and challenging elevations.The event has attracted 171 riders from 29 teams across 35 countries. Dhoni, who has been named the event's goodwill ambassador, said the race would open new avenues for cycling in the country and wished the Indian team luck."With the emergence of Pune Grand Tour, India is pedalling into a new chapter in cycling.—*PTI*

Federer hopes 'Sincaraz' rivalry can thrill fans

DUBAI, 15 JAN

The era-shaping rivalry between Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner has injected fresh energy into men's tennis, 20-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer said on Thursday as he looked forward to a blockbuster Australian Open showdown between the pair. The duo dubbed "Sincaraz" has changed the landscape of the men's game by propelling it beyond the long-dominant "Big Three" of Federer, Rafael Nadal, and Novak Djokovic, thrilling fans and sweeping nine of the last 10 Grand Slam titles between them. They met in six finals overall last year, including at the French Open.—*PTI*

India loses direct spot in AFC Champions League 2

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Despite clarity on the 2025-26 season of the Indian Super League (ISL), the country will not have an automatic spot in next season's AFC Champions League 2 (ACL 2), the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) announced on Thursday. Earlier, India had two spots in Asia: one direct—into the group stages of ACL 2—and one indirect. The direct spot was earned by the ISL Shield winner, while the Super Cup winner took up the indirect spot. The AFC, replying to a letter dated January 12 from the All India Football Federation (AIFF), said failure to meet the minimum match criteria will see India having an opportunity to earn indirect spots in ACL 2 only through zonal qualifiers.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Jasmine fires bogey-free 65 to start year with win

MUMBAI, 15 JAN

Jasmine Shekar got off to a flying start in the new season as she won the opening leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour 2026 at the Bombay Presidency Golf Club on Thursday. The 20-year-old Bengaluru golfer completed a wire-to-wire win as she compiled the week's best card of 5-under 65, which was bogey-free. With rounds of 67-70-65 she totalled 8-under 202 and won by four shots over Ridhima Dilawari (67). Jasmine held a one-shot lead after day one, extended it to two after two rounds and doubled it to four by the end of the event.Jasmine was the only player to card par or better on each of the three days at the Par-70 course.—*PTI*

Vijay Hazare: Vidarbha's Mokhade makes history

He equalled record for most centuries by a batter in single edition

BENGALURU, 15 JAN

Vidarbha opener Aman Mokhade equalled the record for most centuries by a batter in a single edition of the Vijay Hazare Trophy during the semifinal against Karnataka at the BCCI Centre of Excellence Ground 1 in Bengaluru on Thursday.

Mokhade slammed his fifth century of the ongoing tournament to go level with former Vidarbha teammate Karun Nair and Tamil Nadu's N. Jagadeesan.

Karun's five centuries in a single season came during the 2024-25 edition of the 50-over tournament, during which he topped the run charts with 779 runs in eight innings and led Vidarbha to the title clash.

Meanwhile, Jagadeesan's prolific run came during the 2022-23 season as the Tamil Nadu opener ended the tournament with a whopping 830 runs in eight innings, though his team crashed out in the quarterfinals.

In the ongoing competition, Mokhade's centuries have come against Bengal (110), Jammu & Kashmir (139), Baroda (150*), Uttar Pradesh (147), and Karnataka.

Mokhade is also the leading run-getter of the ongoing tournament.

Vidarbha's Aman Mokhade celebrates after scoring a century during the Vijay Hazare Trophy 2025-26 semifinal match against Karnataka PHOTO: PTI

Punjab to take on Saurashtra in VHT semis

Punjab will head into the Vijay Hazare Trophy semifinal against Saurashtra here on Friday, brimming with confidence after surviving a nail-biting one-run victory over domestic powerhouse Mumbai in their final group match.

That thrilling win has set the tone for the rest of their campaign, as was evident in the manner in which Punjab demolished Madhya Pradesh in the quarterfinal. Now, a young and determined Saurashtra side stands in their way.

With charismatic India opener Abhishek Sharma unlikely to feature, wicket-keeper-batter Prabhsimran Singh is expected to lead the side, having already steered Punjab to a commanding 183-run triumph over Madhya Pradesh, underpinned by a colossal 345-run total.

Harnoor Singh, Prabhsimran Singh, Anmolpreet Singh, and Nehal Wadhera all struck impressive half-centuries to turn the contest decisively in Punjab's favour, and a similar batting performance could prove pivotal in steering them towards the final.

—*PTI*

WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE

Gujarat Giants seek revival against in-form RCB

NAVI MUMBAI, 15 JAN

Hoping to arrest their recent slide, Gujarat Giants have a tough task at hand when they take on table-toppers Royal Challengers Bengaluru in their Women's Premier League clash here on Friday.

After briefly leading the six-team standings, the Giants have slipped to third following their defeat to the Mumbai Indians on Tuesday, while former champions RCB have surged to the top with back-to-back wins.

RCB, on the other hand, has grown in strength with every outing, the latest being a commanding chase of 144 against UP Warriorz in under 13 overs.

The biggest positive for them was skipper Smriti Mandhana's return to form after she was dismissed for 18 in the season-opener against the Mumbai Indians.

Mandhana anchored the chase with her trademark elegance and calm, while her opening partner Grace Harris was at her explosive best.

Gujarat will need to find a way to contain RCB's formidable batting line-up, which also features the in-form Nadine de Klerk and the destructive Richa Ghosh, as they look to recover from the setback against the Mumbai Indians.

Their sloppy fielding in that match proved costly, with Harmanpreet Kaur getting three reprieves before she went on to seal Mumbai's 193-run chase with a superb 71 off 43 balls.

"They've been working extremely hard with our fielding coach, Sarah Taylor, and all the other coaches," Gujarat Giants head coach Michael Klinger said. Match starts: 7.30 pm —*PTI*

Gill will return better after T20 WC: GT COO

KOLKATA, 15 JAN

Shubman Gill's omission from India's T20 World Cup squad is merely "one of the hiccups" that occur in every elite sportsperson's career, and the India Test and ODI skipper will return as a "better, stronger" cricketer, Gujarat Titans chief operating officer Colonel Arvinder Singh said on Thursday.

Gill, who was vice-captain of the T20I side, was the most high-profile absentee when the national selectors named a 15-member squad for the global showpiece in India and Sri Lanka starting February 7.Singh said the GT skipper had accepted the decision with maturity and would respond in the only way he knows by performing.These are minor hiccups that do happen in any sportsman's life.

He's already made his stand very clear," Singh told PTI in a virtual interaction on the sidelines of the launch of the third edition of the Junior Titans programme.He respects the decision of the selectors. And all I can say is, knowing him, he'll come back even stronger, as you can see now in the two games that he's played.

He'll come back even a better cricketer than what he was, you know, going forward. —*PTI*

BCB removes its director Najmul Islam

DHAKA, 15 JAN

The Bangladesh Cricket Board was forced to sack its finance committee chairman, Najmul Isla,m on Thursday after senior players of the national team revolted against him for making derogatory comments against them.Despite the removal of Najmul from a key BCB post, two matches ofthe Bangladesh Premier League scheduled on the day were postponed.The players taking part in the BPL were unified in their demand for the immediate removal of Najmul as BCB director.

Under player and public pressure, BCB removed Najmul as chairman of the board's finance committee, but he remains a BCB director."...Following a review of recent developments and in the best interest of the organisation, the BCB President has decided to release Mr Najmul Islam from his responsibilities as Chairman of the Finance Committee with immediate effect," said the BCB in a statement."

Until further notice, the BCB President will assume

the role of Acting Chairman of the Finance Committee. The BCB reiterates that the interests of the cricketers remain its highest priority.

"The Board remains fully committed to upholding the honour and dignity of all players under its jurisdiction...BCB hopes that all cricketers will continue to display the highest standards of professionalism and dedication to the betterment of Bangladesh cricket during what is a challenging period for the game..."...and will do their utmost to ensure continued participation in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL)."The furore started after Najmul, while reiterating Bangladesh's refusal to travel to India for next month's T20 World Cup on account of "security worries", rejected concerns surrounding players' remuneration should the country withdraw.He stated that the players would not be compensated as they have not justified the support so far, having failed to win a single ICC event. The statement caused outrage with CWAB calling for his immediate ouster from BCB. The BCB had also showcased Najmul.

"The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) reiterates its regret over the recent objectionable comments made by a member of the Board."The BCB acknowledges the concern caused by the remarks and wishes to reaffirm its commitment to professionalism, respect for cricketers and the values that nurture the game of cricket," the BCB stated in a press release earlier on Thursday." —*PTI*

U-19 World Cup: India beat USA by 6 wickets

BULAWAYO, 15 JAN

Henil Patel led a ruthless bowling display with an excellent five-wicket haul, setting up India's six-wicket victory over the USA in their rain-hit ICC Under-19 World Cup opener here on Thursday.

The right-arm seamer finished with figures of 5/16 from seven overs with one maiden, ripping through the USA middle-order after India opted to bowl under overcast conditions. The USA were bundled out for a meagre 107 in 35.2 overs.

India's target was revised to 96 in 37 overs after rain interrupted proceedings, with the total reading 21 for one in four overs.

Abhigyan Kundu (42 not out off 41 balls) then saw the team home with 118 balls to spare under the DLS method.

India's chase was delayed by rain, but when play resumed, 14-year-old batting sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi (2) fell cheaply as he was bowled by Ritvik Appidi (2/24 in 5 overs) in the third over.

Appidi cramped Suryavanshi for room with a length delivery before the batter came down the wicket, only to get an inside edge onto the stumps. —*PTI*

GOVT YET TO ISSUE VISAS TO ENGLAND SPINNERS ADIL, REHAN

LONDON, 15 JAN

England's T20 World Cup preparations have been disrupted with the Indian government yet to issue visas to spinners Adil Rashid and Rehan Ahmed, according to a report.

The delay means both players, who have Pakistani heritage, are unlikely to travel with the rest of the squad this weekend for the six white-ball matches (three ODIs and three T20Is) against Sri Lanka, and it remains unclear when they will join their teammates, The Guardian reported.

Rashid is currently playing in the SA20, while Ahmed is in Australia for the Big Bash League, and it is hoped they will be able to fly directly from

those locations once their visas are cleared.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has been assured there is no objection to their applications and has sought assistance from the UK government to expedite the process, though the report added that the timing remains uncertain. With Rashid and Ahmed currently unavailable, Liam is the squad's only specialist spinner, meaning Will Jacks and Jacob. —*PTI*

Lakshya enters quarters; Satwik, Chirag, Srikanth, Prannoy bow out

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Former champion Lakshya Sen produced a composed and tactical performance to progress to the quarterfinals of the USD 950,000 India Open Super 750 badminton tournament, but Kidambi Srikanth and H S Prannoy bowed out after a spirited show here on Thursday.

The top men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, having entered as one of the favourites, also exited after a heartbreaking 27-25, 21-2,3 19-21 loss to world No. 22 Japan's Hiroki Midorikawa and Kyohei Yamashita in the second round later in the day.

Sen, a 2021 world championships bronze medallist, showed resilience and maturity to overcome Japan's Kenta Nishimoto 21-19, 21-11 in the second round to emerge as the only Indian challenge in singles at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium. "At the start of the opening game, I was struggling with my rhythm a bit and was lifting short, and that allowed him to attack more.

Organisers to fix things before World C'ships

It was intended to be a dress rehearsal for the BWF World Championships in August, and the ongoing India Open Super 750 badminton tournament has managed to expose all possible operational gaps that need to be plugged before the marquee competition.

While concerns over playing conditions, air quality, and extreme cold in the national capital have dominated early discussion, a range of venue-related issues. —*PTI*

AIFF says truncated ISL gets AFC recognition

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Thursday said the sport's continental body, AFC, has accorded recognition to the truncated 2025-26 Indian Super League, with winners of the country's top two divisions getting indirect slots tothe Asian Champions League 2 through zonal qualifiers.

Due to a delayed start to the season, the clubs will not be able to play the mandatory 24 matches in the season including the top division league and domestic cup to be eligible to feature in the AFC Champions League 2.

Most clubs are expected to play a total of sixteen (16) matches during the season, including a minimum of three (3) games in the AIFF Super Cup and 13 in ISL.

"Except any additional slot(s) allocated to a Member Association in accordance with Articles 3.4 and 3.5, Member Associations that fail to fulfil the Member Association Eligibility Criteria shall, subject to Article 4.4, be eligible to be allocated only indirect slots for the relevant AFC Club Competition," the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) wrote in a letter to the AIFF dated 15 January. —*PTI*

INDIA OPEN BADMINTON

'Bird droppings' interrupt Prannoy-Loh match

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

"Bird droppings" forced two stoppages during the men's singles second-round match between HS Prannoy and Singapore's Loh Kean Yew at the India Open Super 750 here on Thursday, compounding a growing list of organisational concerns at the tournament.

The unusual interruptions occurred on the third day of the event at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium, already under scrutiny following complaints related to playing conditions, air quality, extreme cold, and a monkey being spotted in the stands earlier this week.

Prannoy's match against former world champion Loh was first halted when the Indian was leading 16-14 in the opening game. It was stopped again early in the decider, with Prannoy ahead 1-0.

On both occasions, tournament officials entered Court 1, the main television court, to clean the playing surface after what appeared to be bird droppings fell from the ceiling.

"It was bird shit that kind of halted the game," Prannoy said in the mixed zone after his 21-18, 19-21, 14-21 loss.

Loh, the 2021 world champion, did not speak about the interruptions but spoke about pollution being an issue. "Everyone's stamina just dropped like two levels. The weather is not good. My health dropped quite a bit. I breathe less. I wear my mask when I can. I stay indoors as much as possible, but that's the only thing that I can do," he said. —*PTI*